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["IF I AM EVER TO MAKE ANYTHING OF MY LIFE, IT MUST BE WITH YOUR HELP, DEAR!" SAID GHOFF.]

PRETTY MISS DRAKE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

THE DRAKES were of good family. They always asserted, themselves, they descended in a direct line from the celebrated Sir Francis of Queen Elizabeth's days; he, poor man, having been in his grave for centuries, could hardly be expected to contradict the statement. But it is a peculiar fact that all the DRAKES one meets nowadays, and the name is by no means startlingly rare, claim the doughty knight as their ancestor, which leads one to believe his sons must have been numerous to begin with, and all blessed with an unusually large posterity.

The particular DRAKES with whom we have to do lived in Essex, not the dingy over-populated part of the much-abused county which surrounds London, but in the extreme north-east, where the waves of the great

German ocean beat restlessly against the coast, and the air is as fresh and pure as can be found in England.

Perhaps it was too fresh and pure; perhaps, had Dr. Drake happened to pitch his tent in a less healthy spot, his profits would have been larger, and his patients more numerous. As it was, the worthy physician earned a very comfortable competence, and possessed a very pleasant home; his enjoyment of both only marred by the consciousness he tried in vain to banish, that he had a large family for whom he had made no provision whatever, since he had never thought of insuring his life till his age rendered him liable to a heavy premium; and as to saving—why, he always argued the little he could put by would make no difference whatever to his family, and it was far better for them in every way to have a little enjoyment in their youth, since they would be sure to make their own way in life later on. Such a bonny clever tribe as his eight boys and girls were not likely to join the ranks either of failures or spinsters.

The DRAKES went everywhere. Their father's position as the leading practitioner of

Northcott, backed by their descent from Sir Francis, did something for them; their own good looks and amiability did more. Every social gathering was graced by the girls' presence, and the young men were in equal request.

Mrs. Drake was as cheery and easy going as her husband; he had no secrets from her, so she was perfectly aware of the uncertainty of their future, but, like the doctor, she had a pleasant knack of banishing disagreeable thoughts. If point-blank questioned by a certain cousin of hers, known in the family as "Charlotte," she always replied that,—

"Theodore came of a long-lived family, and she hoped would be spared to be eighty, when of course the dear children would be able to take care of themselves;" and Charlotte, who had perhaps more common-sense than all the DRAKES put together, bit her lips, and muttered to herself the "dear children" would never be of any use while they had anyone else to lean upon.

Four girls and four boys made up the flock their ages varied from Beryl who was nineteen, to Algernon who had passed thirty;



but it is a painful truth that not one of the eight had ever earned a silver sixpence. Algernon was an artist, but his pictures never sold; the next son was a brilliant barrister; Charley was at home waiting for a Government appointment; and Frank was walking the hospitals.

The four girls came consecutively between the boys, so that each seemed to possess one brother specially her own. They were all amiable, nice-looking, and high-spirited; but Beatrice was so much more than this that from the day she left school she had been called "the pretty Miss Drake," a title with which her sisters, far from resenting, were highly delighted.

Father and mother had decided the beauty should make a grand match; but either Northcott could not produce anyone very rich, or Bee let her heart run away with her, for before she was twenty she had promised to marry a young officer who had nothing in the world but his pay.

The doctor looked glum. Mrs. Drake cried, but both admitted Noel Arden was all that could be desired in everything except money, so they gave a reluctant consent.

Mr. Arden sailed for India, and beyond that "the pretty Miss Drake" wore a pearl ring, and developed an intense interest in the Calcutta mail, things went on very much as they had done before.

And then the blow came, the bubble burst. Dr. Drake, who came of such a long-lived family that he might fairly have been expected to reach ninety—Dr. Drake, who had been the one barrier between that large expensive family and poverty—died, actually died without any warning or preparation, after a few hours' illness, before his fifty-sixth birthday.

There was no time for him to feel regret, no time for anxiety about his family to trouble his last moments; before he well knew he was ill the end had come.

Pretty, kindly Mrs. Drake was a widow, and her eight sons and daughters would have to bestir themselves at last, for beyond the furniture of the White House and such debts as stood on the doctor's books there was absolutely nothing in the world for his wife and children.

There was a great discussion of ways and means. Charlotte, the strong-minded cousin, came to assist at it, and all the eight sons and daughters, while gentle Mrs. Drake, in her widow's weeds, looked so sad and helpless, it seemed terrible she should have to face the prospect of earning her own living.

She sat in her own chair by the fire—the spring was late that year; besides, you can bear a fire right into May most years on the Essex coast—her eyes averted from that other chair opposite, which, with instinctive tact, everyone had left vacant. Miss Charlotte was next Mrs. Drake; Beryl, the youngest girl, had a stool at her mother's feet; and the other seven were scattered about the room, all hating the conference, and yet feeling it must be gone through.

"Do speak, someone," cried Bee, half hysterically. "Have we any money at all, or are we paupers?"

"It's not so bad as that," said Algy, in his slow way. "Alison has offered to take the practice, book debts and all, and pay three hundred pounds down, and fifty pounds a year for five years, besides which he promises to take Frank as his assistant when he qualifies. You mean to accept his offer, don't you mother?"

"Of course she does," said Miss Charlotte. "I only wish he had offered to take the house as well. How on earth is your mother to keep it up on fifty pounds a year?"

"Won't Malone cancel the lease?" asked Bee.

But Malone was of Scotch extraction, despite his name, and he had no mind to have the expensive house thrown on his hands. It must remain for the present a white elephant on the hands of poor Mrs. Drake.

"Well," said Algy, who, as eldest, was

spokesman, "Bob and I are going to share rooms in London. I've got the promise of an appointment as drawing teacher to some art classes, and he means to do something with his pen. It'll be uphill work for us both at first, but, by-and-by, I hope we shall be able to help mother and the girls."

Mrs. Drake looked at him fondly, as though he had secured her a handsome income. Instead of vaguely hoping to do something for her later on, Miss Charlotte ticked off the number on her fingers.

"I'm glad you and Bob are so sensible, Algy. That leaves six of you."

Charley laughed; he really could not help it.

"You can tick off two more, Charlotte. I've got a clerkship in London, and Frank's godfather, like a brick, has offered to pay his expenses till he's passed all his exams."

"It really seems," said Bee, languidly, "all the boys will forsake us. Mother dear, can you be content to keep house with your four girls?"

"Three," said Kate, rather shame-facedly, "for Mr. Marston asked me to marry him yesterday, and I said yes. He thinks dear father wouldn't count it a slight to his memory if we were married quietly; and he does want someone to look after his children so."

"My dear," said her mother, faintly, "are you quite sure of your own mind?" for Mr. Marston was a grave, middle-aged man, and his second wife would have to manage five step-children on a limited income.

"Yes," said Kate, with a blush, "quite sure."

And then, somehow, Mrs. Drake began to remember how ten years ago, when her eldest daughter was a girl in her teens, Mr. Marston had come a great deal to the White House, and she and the doctor had fancied he came for Kitty's sake. Well, his wife had been dead two years now, and people did say it had not been a very happy marriage; perhaps Kate was his true choice after all.

This left only the three younger girls on their mother's hands. Mrs. Drake wondered how they were to manage. She knew quite enough of accounts to see they must do something; the only question was what?

"Why, it's ready to your hand," said Charlotte, practically; "you must take boarders. More and more people come to Northcott every year, and with this large house and grounds you might charge almost any price you liked."

Algernon turned very red.

"Mother might as well let lodgings at once. I wonder you can suggest such a thing."

"Will you suggest anything better?" snapped Miss Charlotte. "If your mother could get rid of this house to-morrow, and sold her furniture, it would fetch perhaps two hundred pounds; the interest of that and Mr. Alison's fifty won't keep four women."

Mrs. Drake winced.

"I don't mind what I do for my children," she said, gently; "but it will be horrid at first to have strangers always with us."

"It is the only way we can keep together," said Mary Drake, gravely. "Even if Beryl and I took situations, the fifty pounds a year wouldn't keep you and Bee, mother; and with Mr. Arden's high family connections, she couldn't go out into the world."

"He will most likely send for me when he hears of our troubles," said Bee, blushing. "He was expecting his step when he wrote last, and with a captain's pay we might manage, if we were economical."

Only Miss Charlotte, whose eyes were very keen, had noticed that the Indian letters had not come quite so regularly lately.

Bee was the old maid's favourite. She was as fond of "the pretty Miss Drake" as she well could be; she admired the constancy with which she had clung to the absent Noel, and privately thought that young gentleman had behaved very selfishly in proposing when he was on the point of leaving England.

"He knew well enough they couldn't be married till he got his step, and that that would be at least three years. It would have been fairer to leave Bee free; and even with a captain's pay they'll be as poor as church mice. In India too, where everything is costly, it'll be hard lines. Perhaps my young gentleman won't be in a hurry to burden himself with a wife now he knows how luxurious existence out there can be to a bachelor; but they've been engaged quite long enough. If her father and mother hadn't been two amiable simpletons, they'd never have consented."

Miss Charlotte was careful not to say one disparaging word of the absent Noel. She enlarged on her plan of turning the White House into a select boarding establishment, and offered her own services as housekeeper and manager till the venture was fairly started.

"You'd be far too liberal, Alice," she told Mrs. Drake, "and it would come hard on you to have to talk business to strangers just now. Let me stay six months and do my best for you. I've enough of my own work to be a burden to you, and I'd rather work for you and the girls than anyone in the world."

Beryl put one hand on the old maid's lap.

"Say yes, mother," she pleaded. "Cousin Charlotte is so clever she will help to make our fortune, and I don't mind taking boarders or anything so that we can all keep together."

Mary agreed with her younger sister. "Mr. Marston is too sensible to look down on us," she said, gravely; "and as for Noel Arden, if it does grate on his feelings, India is so far off he need not trouble—in fact, I see no reason why Bee should tell him."

Bee flushed crimson.

"I tell Noel everything," and then she went out of the room, and her mother sighed.

"They have been engaged nearly four years," she said, doubtfully. "I wish—"

But what it was she wished she had no chance of saying, for the postman's knock was heard, and Beryl ran to ride the letter-box, returning in a minute with half-a-dozen letters, which she poured into her mother's lap.

"The Indian mail's in. Bee was at the box before me, and has rushed upstairs with her treasure. Really postage must be a serious item with a lover in India."

They sat on in the twilight till Miss Charlotte declared it gave her the blues, and she made Algy light the gas. Then she drew up a most business-like advertisement, setting forth the delights of the White House as a summer residence, and all the young Drakes chimed in with suggestions and improvements, till the convulse which had begun so sadly seemed to be concluded with much better spirits, and it was only the mother who thought Bee's absence strange.

At last, when the neat maid brought in supper, Mrs. Drake spoke out her fears as soon as the servant had retired.

"I am afraid Bee has bad news."

"If Noel was ill she'd have been down to tell us," said Beryl. "Bee never can keep her troubles to herself. I expect he's a real live captain, and wants her to go out to him."

"Would he have heard," Mrs. Drake flushed painfully, "of our trouble?"

"Yes," said Algy, promptly. "I calculated he might have answered my letter last week. I am surprised he didn't write to me by this mail."

"You told him everything?"

"Everything—that there wasn't a silver sixpence amongst us. But Arden wouldn't be surprised; she dear old father always told him Bee's face was her fortune."

"And her face is charming," said Beryl. "So, mother dear, Mr. Arden will have a large fortune with his bride."

Mrs. Drake said nothing. She and her husband had liked Noel Arden very much, but since he went to India two deaths in his family had made him rather an important person socially.

He had been very proud in the old days.

Now that there was a chance of his being a peer, would he think he might have "done better" than propose to the daughter of a country doctor?

Not that Arden's prospects were improved peculiarly by his chance of rank. His father, a needy aristocrat, could not afford to allow him a penny; and as his mother had offended all her family by her marriage, it was not likely her relations would help her son.

"I'll go and tell Bee supper's ready," said Miss Charlotte, thoughtfully. "She can't live on love-letters."

When she got upstairs she felt thankful she had not entrusted the errand to Beryl, or suffered Bee's mother to come in search of her, for stretched on the floor by the side of her bed—a poor, motionless little black heap—was the girl whom all Northcott called "Pretty Miss Drake."

Charlotte Hall might be an old maid, and have a sharp tongue when occasion served, but she had a true woman's heart too; and it fairly ached when she looked at Beatrice, and realised the change an hour had made in her. Miss Hall's first act was to bolt the door. Her next to lift the slight figure in her strong arms and lay it tenderly on the bed. She noticed a crumpled paper in the girl's clenched hand, and knew pretty well what had caused her swoon.

"He can't be dead," reflected the old maid, "dead men can't write letters. No, he has heard of her father's death, and thinks he can do better for himself than marry into such an impecunious family."

At last the restoratives took effect. Beatrice opened her beautiful blue eyes languidly, and even tried to sit up.

"You'd better keep quiet, my dear," said the old maid, gently; "but try to tell me, if you can, what's the matter. I shall have to go downstairs in a few minutes, and if there's bad news I'd better have the telling of it than you."

Bee's eyes rested on the letter still lying by her side.

"Is it quite true?" she asked, faintly.

"Oh! I hoped it was some terrible dream."

"It's true enough that the Indian mail's in, and you've heard from Mr. Arden," said Miss Charlotte. "It must have been something in that letter upset you. Is he ill?"

"Oh, no," and the girl shivered, "he is quite well; but I think you'd better read his letter, Cousin Charlotte. I can't tell you about it. It would choke me."

Miss Hall had not read a love-letter for years, and, if this was a fair specimen of them, she devoutly hoped she might never read another.

"MY DEAR LITTLE BEE,—

"I was awfully out up to hear of your father's death. He was one of those jolly old boys one always expects to live to be ninety, and I'm sure I wish he had."

"It is terrible to think of there being absolutely nothing left for your mother and her children; but this nerve me to make a sacrifice I have long felt it my duty to attempt."

"Although I have got my step and am captain, it will be years before I can afford to marry—life out here is so expensive, and habits so luxurious—so, my darling, I am going to be unselfish for once, and give you back your promise. It would be wicked to ask you to spend the best years of your life in waiting for me, and unless my cousin goes off the stocks quicker than I expect, we should be middle aged before we dared to think of matrimony. It was different when you had an easy home to wait in, but now difficulties much touch you, I won't add to them. Good-bye, my best and dearest; that you may be happy with some better fellow than I, is the prayer of your ever devoted friend,—

"NOEL ARDEN."

"Well!"

Beatrice was sitting up and watching Miss Hall with intense earnest scrutiny as she laid down the letter.

"My dear Bee, he is a scoundrel!"

Beatrice put out her hand as though to avert a blow.

"Please don't speak against him, it can do no good, and will only hurt me. I was puzzled when I read it first. I wondered if he really meant it unselfishly."

"He meant he wanted to break off his engagement," said Miss Hall, with terrible frankness; "but would like to persuade you he did it for your sake. Men marry every day on his present income."

"Noel is so proud," commented the deserted girl; "he could bear to marry the daughter of a country physician, but to have a mother-in-law letting lodgings, and four brothers-in-law all more or less struggling to get a living, would have been too much for him."

"Is it true he expects to be a nobleman?"

"Quite true. His uncle lately lost two sons and a younger brother. The uncle himself is an old man, and his only remaining son has always been in delicate health. He is a dreamy romantic young man, buried in his books, and will never marry. Failing him Noel will inherit the Earldom in right of his mother."

"Well," said Miss Charlotte, "and to anyone but her favourite Bee she would have spoken far more bitterly, 'you would have made a bonnie Countess; but, to my mind, child, you're well rid of him.'"

"I'm glad of one thing—that father never knew. You see he believed in Noel."

"My dear, he believed in everyone, more's the pity; but Bee, if you can only think so, you're happier than if you'd married Captain Arden, and found out later on he thought he had made a sacrifice."

"Will you tell mother it's all over?" pleaded Bee; "and beg her and the rest never to mention him to me again. I couldn't bear it, Cousin Charlotte, if they kept all on abusing Noel. You see, whatever he is now, I loved him, and all I want is never to hear his name again."

Miss Hall promised, but she had no easy task. The family, who had thought Noel Arden a poor match for their beautiful Beatrice, were simply furious at his heartlessness. They would all have liked to write him indignant letters, and abuse him roundly among themselves, but Charlotte changed their views.

"I suppose you don't want him to change his mind, and come and beg Beatrice to take him on again?"

"Hardly," replied Algy, "he always was a coward; but I didn't think him as bad as this. If he came into a room where I was, I should walk out."

"Well, the only thing you can do for Bee is never to mention his name. Let her forget he ever existed."

"I don't think Bee is good at forgetting," said her mother, slowly.

"No," admitted Cousin Charlotte; "if Noel Arden had been her faithful lover, taken from her by yellow fever or anything else people die of out there, I believe she'd have mourned him all her life; but you see it's different. He's deceived her, and now he's shown her what a miserable craven creature he really is; and so I think she'll get over it."

They all yielded to the spinster's decision. Mrs. Drake would mention to an intimate friend the engagement was broken off, which would be equivalent to publishing the fact in a local paper. Then they might be sure no awkward remarks from the outside world would greet Beatrice; and her family solemnly pledged themselves never to mention Noel Arden's name before her.

Miss Hall carried the news of her success to Bee. She found the girl busily engaged packing up a parcel securely wrapped in brown paper.

Charlotte could guess it contained the letters she had valued so dearly. Something else was there too—Noel's portrait, and the ring he had once placed on her finger.

"Will you see they are posted?" Bee whis-

pered; "and then I think I will go to bed. I feel so very tired, and—it is finished."

And that was the end of pretty Miss Drake's engagement.

Other things followed thick and fast. The "boys" went off to London to begin the new life they had mopped out for themselves.

Kate was quietly married to Mr. Marston, and went to live in the neat red-brick house at the other end of Northcott.

Mary conceived a fancy to see the world, and went to America as companion to the wife of a New York merchant.

Only Beryl and Bee remained of Mrs. Drake's eight children in the old home when, on the first of June, the White House opened its doors for the first time to paying guests, and gradually became, thanks to Charlotte Hall's energy and good management, one of the most successful boarding establishments on the East Coast.

CHAPTER II.

FAR away in India, just two or three months after Dr. Drake's death, a young man sat in very pleasant bachelor quarters puffing away lazily at a choice cigar, and looking rather more serious than his occupation—he was only burning over a pile of invitations—warranted.

He was a very handsome man, though some people called him effeminate, and it would have needed a very close observer, a very keen judge of character, to challenge the general statement that Captain Arden was charming.

"It's an awful nuisance," reflected Noel, as he pushed the letters aside and tried to decide a question which he felt could not be much longer shelved. "I do declare that of all positions in the world that of an heir-presumptive is the worst. Here's my uncle turned seventy, and never given a thought to a woman since my anna's death. It's all nonsense to pretend he's likely to marry again, the old boy wouldn't be so mean; and everyone knows Val can't live much longer. I'm as much the heir of Errolstone as though I had been born Viscount Dene, and yet the Jews won't come to my assistance and give me enough to keep me comfortably till I come into my earldom; it's absurd."

He took a sheet of paper from his pocket, and began to read again his father's last letter, in which Major Arden related the hopeless attempts he had made to negotiate a loan on his son's behalf, efforts Noel felt sure must have been genuine, since a goodly slice of the spoils would have rewarded the paternal success, and the Major, though his second wife had a large fortune tied up on herself, was always short of money.

"If your debts are so pressing," advised the Major, "I can only advise you to find a wife rich enough to pay them. Then you might sell out and come home to England, which would suit you much better than spending the best years of your life in India. No one I have tried will so much as hear of 'accepting' your paper; they seem so sure your uncle may 'marry yet.' That though I'm on confidentially bad terms with the Earl, I actually called on him and asked the question, meaning to congratulate him. He was rude enough, but he didn't beat about the bush."

"My heart is buried in my wife's grave," he said coldly; "and after Dene your son is my next heir. You may tell that to all the Jews in England, if you like, on my authority." Of course I respectfully informed him I had told them, and it was of no use. I hinted that you found it impossible to keep straight on your pay, and that you had even most generously released Miss Drake from her engagement, feeling you had no right to let her waste the best years of her life in waiting for you. He did seem interested in that; asked a lot of questions about her, said it was very hard lines, and soon; but when I hinted the help an allowance of even five hundred a year would be to you be froze again, said you'd get no money from him in his lifetime, and he'd

warned Dene not to give you a shilling. He couldn't help you coming in for the property in due course, but you shouldn't begin to make ducks and drakes of it a day sooner than you were Lord Errolsdene. So you see, my boy, I did the best I could for you, but I failed ignominiously; and really, if things are as bad as you think, you can't do better than marry the first heiress who is willing to bestow herself on you!"

To do Noel Arden justice, he had loved Beatrice as much as he was capable of loving anyone except himself. It had cost him something to dissolve their engagement, but he was in fearful straits. His debts had assumed such awful proportions he dreaded their coming to the knowledge of his commanding officer.

He sat on in silent thought. His man came in to remind him of a dance to which he was engaged; and pulling himself together by an effort, he began to dress.

He knew that at the entertainment where he was bidden he should meet Blanche Olive, the only child of a rich Calcutta merchant. If he was to sell himself, as well to her as to anyone else. The Calcutta merchant was not his ideal of a father-in-law; but he could take the Major's advice, sell out, and live obdiently in England. It was worth trying, anyhow.

No thought of the girl's heart, and all she might suffer through him, troubled the gallant soldier.

Blanche was pretty, gentle, and peculiarly sweet-tempered—the last wife in the world likely to remind her husband of all he gained by marrying her. Noel Arden had almost made up his mind.

"Captain Arden, I thought you were never coming!"

There was a trace of reproach in the tone. Noel had been so very attentive to Miss Olive of late that she had grown to look on him as her sworn cavalier.

She was dressed in soft, cream-coloured gauze, relieved here and there by dashes of crimson—a trying combination, but one that suited her dusky hair and glorious dark eyes. Those eyes were her chief charm; for the rest she was very small and almost fairy-like in figure, while her face had the fragile delicacy common to children born in the East.

There were many who predicted Blanche would "never make old bones," founding their opinion chiefly on the fact that she was the last survivor of eight children; but the girl never ailed anything, and she was so undeniably the darling of her father's heart, that for her sake he would have welcomed a suitor far less outwardly eligible than the heir presumptive to an English peerage seemed to him.

"Did you think I could stay away," asked Noel, in his musical voice, "when I knew that I should meet you?"

"So few men care for dancing," said little Blanche, "and it was getting late."

He smiled.

"And now I have come, you will give me all your waltzes?"

"Not all—one or two."

He took her programme and scrawled his initials in half-a-dozen vacant places—places purposely kept vacant for him.

"If you are tired, we can sit some of them out," he said, cheerfully. "I want to talk to you."

And somewhere about midnight, as they were sitting in a snug recess hidden from curious eyes, while they listened to the dreamy music of a German waltz, Noel collected his energies to the point.

"Do you know what I want to ask you?" he whispered. "Have you any suspicion, little girl, of all you are to me? Blanche, I want you to give yourself to me, and be my little wife."

And she, poor child, loved him, so her answer was not hard to guess.

His interview with Mr. Olive the next day was less to his liking. But two things played into his hand; the merchant had an almost

absurd regard for a title, and the station doctor had peremptorily ordered Blanche home to England.

The little lady's own wishes weighed for much with her father, but the thought that Noel Arden could one day make her a countess, and could at once take her from the climate which was impairing her health, counted for even more.

"I have sent in my papers," said Noel, quite forgetting to mention he had only posted them that very day; "my father wrote to advise the step. My uncle, Lord Errolsdene, is getting into years, and all my people think it would be better for me to be on the spot."

"The Earl has one son, I believe."

"Yes; who will keep me out of the title for the term of his natural life. But, poor Dene will hardly survive his father; he has been in a consumption for years, and he is peculiar—not quite right here," and Noel touched his own forehead.

It was the strangest mixture of truth and falsehood. Viscount Dene had been a sickly boy, and was now a delicate man; for years his father feared he would go into a decline. He was a clever, thoughtful, intelligent young man, but his very delicacy of health had made him peculiar; and while no one but his first cousin had ever impugned his sanity, most people, if asked off hand whether Lord Dene was eccentric, would have answered "yes."

Mr. Olive was delighted with Captain Arden's frankness. Noel confessed until his uncle's death he was badly off; that his debts would take most of the price of his commission, and his father was unable to make him any allowance.

"His second wife, Lady Barbara, is very rich, and my father lives in style, but naturally, I can't be indebted to my step-mother. My father hopes that when I am on the spot he may get me some diplomatic post, he's plenty of influence, and Blanche and I might put in a year or two very pleasantly at some European Court until the time came for us to be Lord and Lady Errolsdene."

Mr. Olive beamed approval. He saw himself, a few years hence, the father of a real live countess, and the prospect charmed him. Noel was the handsomest man in his regiment, and Blanche "fancied" him; what could be better?

"I shall allow my daughter two thousand a-year as long as I live," he told the suitor, "and give her ten thousand pounds on her wedding-day, which had better be settled on herself, so that she may have the interest as pin money. Then, whenever anything happens to me, she'll have all I've made. I believe it's half a million, but my lawyer shall talk to you."

Noel was more than satisfied. Two thousand a-year would support a far grander ménage than he contemplated, and he knew Mr. Olive's fortune was secure, and that no business crisis could shake it. The lawyer frankly congratulated him; but, being a keener man than the merchant, and having a very kindly regard for little Blanche, he introduced, unauthorized, a clause into the settlement which Noel Arden would not have approved of had he troubled to read the long document through. The allowance of two thousand a-year ceased absolutely if Blanche died before her father, or if her husband attempted in any way to anticipate or alienate it, and the dowry of ten thousand was hers only for life. At her death the principal reverted to her children, or failing these to her father.

"That'll make him careful of her," thought the lawyer, with a chuckle, "since only while she lives can he touch a shilling of her money."

"It seems hard on him," objected Mr. Olive when he read the settlements.

"Not a bit. It'll prevent his running through his wife's fortune, and, my friend, Miss Blanche won't make the position painful to him."

Noel was much too careless to peruse the deed carefully. He knew the main facts and was content. Preparations were hurried on and the wedding took place in August, not many weeks after the proposal, and only four short months since he had broken off his engagement to the pretty Miss Drake.

How lucky it was, Noel reflected. He had never published the fact that he was an engaged man when first he "came out." How lucky there was not a creature in Calcutta who knew about Beatrice and the part she had played in his life? The utmost anyone could say was that at one time he had received a great many letters in a lady's handwriting, and the most censorious could not make much out of that. And Blanche Olive was the last person in the world to be suspicious. She was wrapped up in her lover, and would as soon have doubted her own fealty as his. Nevertheless Noel felt very glad the betrothal was a brief one, and was considerably relieved the day he went on board the good ship *Amazon* with his pretty bride, a liberal cheque in his pocket for "the honeymoon," and the consciousness that the first quarter's allowance already awaited him at the London agents of Mr. Olive's banker.

They had an excellent passage, the voyage being a perfect pleasure trip. The Major, duly apprised by his son of the course of events, was waiting to meet them at Southampton with a very warm invitation from his wife to visit her at Westwood, her country seat.

Lady Barbara liked Noel. He was grown up when she married, so he had been no trouble to her.

She had only a life interest in her property, so she need fear no interested motives in his attention; and she was honestly proud of the handsome fascinating young soldier.

"You must come," said the Major, cheerfully, "my wife's longing to know your bride, and we shall have a good large party down for the shooting, so you won't be dull."

Blanche had gone below to give some directions to her maid, so Noel could ask without fear.

"Does Lady Barbara know about Northcott?"

"No; I never told her. It was the most foolish thing you ever did, and she would have had no sympathy with you. I knew all along you would come to your senses, and those kind of things are best kept secret."

"Then I shall be delighted to come to Westwood."

Lady Barbara welcomed the young couple very kindly. In that handsome house of hers a few more people made no difference, and she was hospitable to the backbone.

Noel had done exceedingly well for himself, therefore he ought to be encouraged; and as for Blanche she was a dear little thing, just the sort of wife for a headstrong fellow like Noel, who would expect his partner to do all the bearing and forbearing needed in the marriage state.

CHAPTER III.

If poor Dr. Drake could have revisited the world a year after he left it, he would have found a great deal to astonish him, and would have been perfectly bewildered to see how amazingly well his family had got on without him.

It was not that they had forgotten him or ceased to mourn him. Their memories still held him very dear; but it really seemed that his death had given all the young people an impetus to rouse up and help themselves.

They had been content to take life very easily, and let him work for all; but when their prop was gone they suddenly turned to with a will, and really now were doing as well as most of their contemporaries, who had launched themselves at the proper age into life's battle.

Algy, to begin with him, had as much teaching as he could manage, added to which one

of his pictures—a little sketch of Northoot in spring—had actually been hung on the walls of the Academy. It was awfully "skied," but still there it was, and for all time the honour of having exhibited a picture at Burlington House would belong to him.

Robert, still briefless, was picking up a very decent living with his pen. Charley had had a "rise," and in less than twelve months Frank might be expected down in his native place as Mr. Alison's assistant.

So much for the sons. The daughters would compare favourably with the brothers. Kate was a marvel of happiness on small means. Mary was still on her travels, while Beatrice and Beryl contributed not a little to the success of the White House—a success so remarkable that gentle Mrs. Drake had actually put by quite a nice little hoard in the bank.

And Beatrice—

Kate's marriage and Mary's absence abroad brought it about quite naturally that the third sister should be "Miss Drake."

The dear old days when she had been pointed out to strangers as "the pretty one" were past and gone.

She was older and more thoughtful than in the days when she had been Noel Arden's betrothed; but no one could have said she was "wearing the willow" for him.

She went about her daily round with the utmost cheerfulness. She was neither soured nor blighted; and though she shrank with almost pain from the mention of Captain Arden's name, Miss Charlotte believed that the very discovery of his baseness had helped her to get over her sorrow, and that when she saw his marriage in the paper her cure was quite complete.

But the experience had changed her. None of the careless youth of Northoot would have had a chance of pleasing Bee now. It seemed as though the trouble had raised her standard and put her on altogether another level to most girls of her acquaintance.

"She'll not break her heart," pronounced Miss Charlotte, talking the matter over with Mrs. Drake; "but she'll not marry unless she finds a man she can be proud of out and out. May be when she's thirty she'll marry some clever statesman, and fill her life with his work."

It seemed a very gloomy prospect to Mrs. Drake, who herself had married at twenty, and who thought it hard with eight grown-up children she could only boast of one grand-child, Kate's baby-girl, who was the special darling of the White House.

"I only hope," she said slowly, "Noel Arden will never cross my path. I don't think I could forgive him, Charlotte!"

"And I'm sure I couldn't," echoed Miss Hall; "but he'd keep far enough away, mark my words, Alice. He won't want his fine new wife to hear anything we could tell her!"

It was May, the Northoot season had not commenced, and only one or two habitués of the White House gathered round Mrs. Drake's table.

It would be very different in another six weeks, for July, August and September were the fashionable time for strangers to visit the pretty East-coast watering place; but at present, as Miss Charlotte expressed it, "there was nothing much to do," and the cheerful spinster, who had by no means renounced the world and its delights, declared her intention of going up to London to see the Academy and other sights, taking Beryl with her.

"You and your mother will manage very well while there are so few people, Bee; and those there are seem more like old friends than anything else."

Bee agreed at once; she knew how much they owed Charlotte Hall, and was delighted her cousin meant to take a well-earned holiday. Had it been a month later in the season she might have shrunk from being left in charge, for Miss Charlotte always managed the pecuniary department, neither Bee nor her mother being good women of business.

In fact, these two, if told their terms were

higher than the applicant could afford, would straightway have offered to reduce them. As Charlotte often told Bee, they did not understand the art of growing rich.

So Miss Hall and Beryl went off to London; and the very next afternoon, as Beatrice sat alone in a pretty little sitting-room which was sacred to Mrs. Drake's own family, the neat parlour-maid came in to tell her a gentleman was waiting in the drawing-room who would not give his name.

"Mistress is lying down with a bad headache," remarked the abigail, "so I thought I had better come to you."

"Quite right, Rhoda; I'll be down directly." But willingly as she agreed to the task, Bee hated it. She did not mind making herself amiable to the paying guests when they once came; but to conduct the negotiations, and haggle, if need be, over "extras," was odious to her. Still, it would be hard indeed if Charlotte could never take a holiday; so Bee "pulled herself together," as the saying is, and went downstairs.

She took it for granted that the stranger was old. As a rule young men do not frequent boarding-houses, unless, indeed, they are so young as to come in their parents' train. It was a surprise to her to see a tall, grave-looking man of not much over thirty, with a pleasant thoughtful face, the deep mourning-band on his hat testifying to his having sustained some recent loss.

"My name is Dene," he said courteously. "Some friends told me it was possible you might have rooms free. I am in delicate health, and my doctor has prescribed cheerful society."

Beatrice looked at him, and decided two things: he was a gentleman and he was poor. No man who had not to consider the expenditure of every shilling very closely would come alone in search of health, uncared for by sister or mother.

With an utter disregard of Miss Charlotte's maxims and the prosperity of the White House, Bee agreed to let Mr. Noel have a bedroom, and the use of a tiny slip as a study, for the nominal terms of two guineas a week; and then he departed to the station in search of his luggage; and Bee went off to tell what she had done to her mother, who was just sitting down to her private cup of tea.

"My dear," said Mrs. Drake, nervously, "if he is an invalid I do hope he has had nothing infectious."

"I am sure of that. He wouldn't deceive anyone, he has the truest face I ever saw; and, mother, he gets his living by writing, so we must be good to him for Bob's sake."

This was rather a sweeping conclusion. Mr. Dene had said he was "obliged to write a good deal" when he asked for the use of a private study; but Bee put it down at once that he was an author, a struggling one she feared, from the shade of melancholy in his appearance.

"Dear, dear," sighed Miss Charlotte, when she came home and found Mr. Dene installed at the White House as though he meant to stay there for ages, "he's a very pleasant-spoken man; but struggling authors are generally Bohemians, and I'll warrant, Bee, you never asked him for references."

"I forgot all about it," confessed Bee, frankly; "but I'm sure Mr. Dene's all right, Cousin Charlotte. He said some friends recommended him to come here."

"What friends?" demanded Miss Hall.

"I never thought of asking."

But perhaps Mr. Dene thought the spinster would be more curious than Mrs. Drake and her daughters, for he took the chance given him by a *laissez-faire* with Miss Charlotte to tell her he had been advised to try and be received at the White House by Mrs. Meredith, who had spent some months there the previous summer.

Now the Merediths were people after Miss Hall's own heart, rich, liberal, refined, and with a subtle sense of sympathy, which made them invariably treat the ladies of the White House as friends and equals.

"The Merediths were charming people," pronounced Miss Charlotte. "We were hoping they might come again this summer."

"That is hardly likely, I fear. They sailed for America last month."

"Dear me! I thought Mr. Meredith was quite settled in England. We heard he had an excellent appointment in Surrey."

"He was steward and agent to a nobleman," replied Mr. Dene, who seemed quite *au fait* in the Merediths' affairs, "and I don't think they would ever have parted company, but Mrs. Meredith had an uncle out Chicago way who died suddenly, and it seems she may be heiress to some property out west, so it was best to go and see about it."

"Of course," said Miss Charlotte, who had a keen eye to the main chance, "but it will be a great pity if he loses his position in Surrey. Such things are not to be met with every day."

"No," said Geoffrey Dene, with a lazy glance from his beautiful brown eyes, "I suppose not; but Meredith won't lose it. They've put in a stop-gap for six months, a very learned old fossil, honest and good at accounts, but as prosy as possible. If you'll believe me, I offered my services to Meredith as his deputy, but he refused them with scorn—told me I couldn't add up a column of figures without going over them two or three times to see if I was right."

Miss Charlotte looked shocked.

"Don't you think, Mr. Dene, that's not exactly a thing to be proud of?"

Geoffrey Dene smiled.

"Well," he said, simply, "I suppose we all have different gifts, and mine doesn't lay in arithmetic; but it doesn't matter much, because I've never had any particular need to add up columns of figures."

Miss Hall shook her head.

"You think me frivolous, I'm afraid," said the boarder, with a smile which cut short the reproof trembling on her lips.

"Not frivolous, Mr. Dene, but—"

"Please go on," said Geoff, gravely, "it isn't often anyone takes enough interest in me to find fault with me."

"I should not presume to do that," she bridled a little; "only with your talents—we can all see you are clever—isn't it a pity you haven't settled to any regular employment? Story-writing," and her expression grew softer as she thought of Bob, "may be a very good help to one's income, but a man should have something else to depend on."

Mr. Dene smiled.

"I quite agree with you, Miss Hall; but I don't quite see the application of the moral in my case. I never wrote a story in my life, and, what's more, I don't believe it's in me."

Miss Charlotte felt nonplussed.

"We all thought you wrote," she said, stiffly.

"So I do—heaps and heaps of letters; but I've never tried my hand at literature. The truth is, Miss Hall, if I'm idle it's more the result of circumstances than my own doing. My mother left me a little money, two hundred a-year all told, and till I was thirty I had dreadful health. I believe the doctors never thought I should pass twenty-one. The years most men spend in studying for a profession or learning a trade I was a hopeless invalid. It's only the last two or three years I've been tolerably well; and I don't think I'm ambitious, so I've just drifted on."

"It's very well for you," returned his mentor, frankly; "but suppose you ever wanted to marry, two hundred a-year wouldn't keep a wife and children."

"I—I suppose not."

"You are not an old man," she went on, kindly, "you can't be much over thirty."

"Thirty-four last birthday."

"Then surely it is not too late even now for you to settle to some respectable employment. If you earned ever so little at first, it would be better than the idle, aimless life you lead now."

"Perhaps it would," and he smiled rather oddly. "Well, when Meredith comes back I'll think seriously about it, but for the present I'll take a holiday and enjoy myself. Do you know, I think Northcott's an awfully nice place!"

"I am very fond of it."

"You've lived here a long time perhaps?"

"Mrs. Drake has. She came to this house a bride. All her married life has been spent here. Dr. Drake only died last year in the spring." And then thinking the story of the young cousins might fire him to follow their example, she told him of the evening when they all sat down to "talk over" the future, and how it had ended in the eight sons and daughters, who had seemed so helpless while their father lived, all taking their part in life's battle bravely.

"They are all doing well," she said, proudly, "and all working hard; for though the two girls you know live at home, they both take their share in domestic duties."

"She is very pretty," said Mr. Dene, absently. "Do you know, since I've been here I've longed to kick that fellow."

"What in the world are you talking of?" asked Miss Charlotte, sharply.

"I beg your pardon. I ought not to have alluded to it; but I have a slight acquaintance with Major Arden, and I had heard of his son's engagement to 'pretty Miss Drake.' When I saw Noel's marriage to Miss Olive in the papers I drew my own conclusions."

"If there's a creature I despise, it's Captain Arden," said Miss Hall, hotly, "and I pity his wife from the bottom of my heart."

Geoffrey Dene nodded.

"She'll need it. I think, myself, if Miss Drake knew the fellow's real character she would feel she had had a lucky escape."

"We never speak of it," said Charlotte; "it was the one thing she asked, that she might never hear his name. But Bee's a brave girl; she must see now the ideal she cherished never existed, and that her idol was only base clay. I shouldn't be surprised if all she felt for Noel Arden now was a pretty keen contempt."

After such an intimate conversation Miss Charlotte could not go on snubbing the new comer; and the sisters, after a week or two, told each other that Mr. Dene was one of cousin's favourites.

"Only," said Beryl, with a laugh, "she has implored me not to fall in love with him. She seems to think him most dangerously fascinating, and spent quite half-an-hour yesterday in warning me of the miseries and discomforts of matrimony if committed on an income of two hundred a year."

"Mr. Dene is not a marrying man," said Beatrice, gravely. "You have only to look at him to see his heart is buried in a grave; the deep mourning band on his hat is for his fiancée."

"Well, if it is, he seems pretty cheerful, considering," returned Beryl, pleasantly. "I told cousin Charlotte she need not be in the least afraid. I admired Mr. Dene, and liked him as a friend, but I should never fall in love with him."

She went gaily downstairs, and Beatrice Drake pressed one hand against the table as though she needed its support. What ailed her that the mere mention of Geoffrey Dene's marrying had power to move her thus? She and he were friends; she liked to listen to his conversation—he had travelled so much, and knew about so many things she was interested in; she had been delighted to see him gaining health and strength in the soft June sunshine; she had even wondered as to his romance, and pitied the dead girl for whose sake he wore that mourning band; but, till Beryl's careless words, she had never dreamed that her feeling for Mr. Dene was aught but friendship.

Like a flash the truth came to her. She who had wasted the love of her youth upon a man utterly unworthy, she who had resolved never again to have a feeling of even affection outside her own family, had learned to care

for Geoffrey with all the passionate intensity of a woman's heart.

Thrown into his society day by day in pleasant, friendly intimacy, she could not but notice the nameless superiority which distinguished him from the other men of her acquaintance. His sad, handsome face, his almost wistful expression, seemed to say that his life had not been a happy one; and Beatrice knew—even while she hated herself for the knowledge—there was nothing in the world she would not have done for the man who had become her hero.

The White House was very full in July, and parties of pleasure were arranged nearly every day. Mrs. Drake and her girls sharing in many of them, for such functions always went off the better for their presence; and long residence at Northcott had made them familiar with all the pleasantest excursions to be made from that picturesque spot.

As a rule, Mr. Dene did not join in these outings, but one particular day, when an excursion had been planned to Ipswich, he announced his desire to be one of the party.

"It will be delightful," said Beryl, "if we get a nice day. We will drive into Harwich, so as not to be tired, and then go down the Orwell to Ipswich by steamer."

"But is there anything to see in Ipswich?" demanded a rather blasé Londoner.

"Heaps. Churches without end; a wonderful arch dedicated—though that's not the word—to Wolsey; streets that look as though they hadn't been altered for centuries, and then the river itself."

"But we can't go all together, like a flock of sheep," objected a young lady.

"We never try to. We break up into parties of twos and threes, and go and see what we fancy. For my part, I like to prow about the old part of the town, but Beatrice loves nothing so well as rowing herself about in a little boat, just as though she didn't see enough of the water from the steamer."

Fortune favoured them with a lovely day, and a party of twelve left the White House in the highest of spirits. There were two married ladies, each with two or three sons and daughters; a sprinkling of gentlemen—mostly husbands and fathers.

Geoffrey Dene and the two Miss Drakes were indeed the only persons in the party who could have been described as "marriageable."

Beryl was fond of children, and the little boys seized on her as their property, while, by accident or design, when they were fairly on board the steamer, Geoffrey found himself at her sister's side.

Beatrice was unusually silent that morning. Mr. Dene watched her and wondered whether she was thinking of her erstwhile lover, Noel Arden. Then she spoke, and unconsciously answered him.

"I never go to Ipswich without thinking of my father. This was his favourite pleasure trip, and, busy as he was, he always found time to go with us once a year."

"I don't wonder at his choice. The river is lovely just by here."

"Isn't it? Do you know, Mr. Dene, I like the river far better than the sea. The sea is so cruel and treacherous."

Well it had proved so to her, Mr. Dene thought. Had Noel Arden seen her constantly, he must have been faithful to her. It was the cruel sea rolling between them for three long years which had made it easy for him to forget her.

"Yet some people love the sea," he answered. "I am fond of it myself. I fancy I have crossed the ocean as often as any man not a sailor by profession, and I have enjoyed the voyages each one more than the last."

"I should hate to go a long voyage," replied Bee; "it's a good thing we are not rich, for I should never have made a good hand at foreign travel."

"Don't you ever get tired of Northcott?" he asked her, suddenly; "beautiful and tranquil as it is, don't you ever long for a wider life?"

"I used to," said Bee, frankly. "I used to fret at the narrowness of the people who had lived in our little town always, and pray I should never grow like them—but I am wiser now. It isn't where one lives or what people one sees that form our lives, Mr. Dene."

"You could never be narrow-minded," he said, eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know. Twenty years hence, Mr. Dene, if the White House still receives boarders, they may describe me as a very fussy, fidgety old maid."

"Never."

She smiled.

"I shall stay at the White House while my mother lives, because she wants me. She would never understand my leaving her, but I mean to do something with my life. Sometime, when no one needs me here, I shall go to London."

"London!" He stared at her in amazement. It was the last thing he had expected her to say. "You mean you would like to see the world and enjoy a little of its pleasures?"

"I shall see the world," replied Bee, "but I don't know about its pleasures. When I go to London, Mr. Dene, I mean to be a hospital nurse, if I am not too old to be trained."

"A hospital nurse—you!"

"Why not?" she asked. "Father always said I had almost a magic charm in a sick-room, and I should like to feel I had done just a little for other people."

She shook off her serious mood as they drew near Ipswich, and became gayer than he had ever seen her. When the merry party passed off the landing-stage Geoffrey and Beatrice were a little behind the others. Mr. Dene resolved that if it rested with him this distance should be by no means lessened.

"You promised to show me Ipswich," he told Bee, cheerfully. "What are you going to begin the exhibition with?"

"I don't know."

"Shall we go for a row on the river?"

"You only say that because you hear I am fond of the water. We will go and see the town and Wolsey's arch first."

It appeared, however, that this was a very grand day for Ipswich. Some very noble lady was coming to open a large bazaar, and a lot of lesser luminaries were following in her train. Geoffrey and Beatrice found themselves perforce pushed into the throng of sightseers, unable to move forward until the crush was over and the local magnates had reached the entrance to the bazaar.

Suddenly, without a word of warning, as the third carriage was setting down its load, Geoffrey felt the hand that rested on his arm tremble. He looked up suddenly, and saw descending from the carriage a young man, whose handsome face was marred by an expression of extreme discontent. He handed out a young girl, almost a child, pretty enough to win admiration from the crowd, and dressed in the height of fashion. Yet, poor little thing, she seemed almost frightened as she looked into the angry face of her cavalier, and, putting her little hand on his arm, followed him up the steps into the hall.

Geoffrey Dene understood why Bee shivered in the summer sunshine, but he said nothing until they were out of the road, walking down a quiet bye-street, whose name of Silence-street seemed most aptly chosen, since there was not a single passer-by except themselves; and the tall old-fashioned houses had a veil of quietness over them as though given over to calm and repose.

No fancy could have pictured a gossiping group at that street corner, or a little face peeping curiously through the blinds; the quiet of another century had settled on the place; and Geoffrey Dene felt as secure from interruption as though he had been alone with Beatrice on a desert island.

"You are better now?"

"I am quite well—please don't think—"

"I will think nothing except what you tell

me. That man was Captain Arden, and you had not seen him for a long time?"

"Not for nearly five years. He went away to India before we had been engaged a month. I am glad to have seen him!"

"Glad!"

"Yes," said Bee simply. "I have known for a long time now that I was mistaken in him; but I never knew how much until today. I pity his wife."

"A great many people do that, I fancy."

"But she was an heiress. Surely that would keep him true to her?"

"Miss Drake, he is true to her as the world counts truth, but he doesn't trouble himself to hide from her that there is no love for her in his heart, and her affection rather bores him than otherwise. They go into society a great deal, and are a very fashionable couple; but I think she was meant for a higher life, and that her troubles are slowly crushing her. I know she is only the shadow of the bright-faced bride who came to England last September."

"You speak as if you knew her!"

"I have seen her perhaps half-a-dozen times. I never spoke to her."

"I wonder—" she paused.

"No!" answered Geoff as promptly as though he had read her thoughts. "I should say Mrs. Arden knew nothing about you. They are staying a few miles the other side of Ipswich with Lady Barbara Arden, the Captain's step-mother. You need not be afraid of meeting them again. You may be sure he would not return to Northoot."

"I am not afraid," said Bee dreamily. "I always felt we should meet once more. The world is a very small place after all!"

They had turned back towards the river now, and Geoff again spoke of a row.

"I am not a very good carman," he said frankly; "but I think my skill is enough for the river. I wouldn't undertake to navigate a boat on the sea."

"I can row tolerably," agreed Bee, "so let us venture."

A small boat, only holding two—for they declined the attendance of the owner. Geoff handed in Bee, stepped after her, and in another moment they were floating down the Orwell, whose waters were as smooth and tranquil as a lake.

Geoff looked at his companion in her trim black serge gown and white blouse. It seemed to him he asked nothing more of life than that he might always float down its stream with Beatrice.

"Do you know, Miss Drake, your cousin gave me a long lecture the other day on my idleness."

"You must not be vexed with Charlotte," answered Bee; "she is so frightfully energetic herself, she can't help trying to infect other people."

"I am not vexed at all. I have been thinking seriously of taking her advice, Beatrice," and he looked earnestly into the girl's blue eyes. "If I am ever to make anything of my life it must be with your help, dear. Do you think you could ever care enough for me to go out into the world and fight its battle at my side?"

"But—"

He interrupted her.

"You said to-day your mother would not spare you to be a hospital nurse, but she spared your eldest sister to marry Mr. Marston. I have two hundred a year, inherited from my mother, which I could settle on you, and I would work as I never did before if only I had you as my object."

"You don't understand," said Bee, gently. "I am not afraid of poverty, and I—I care for you; but I thought, we all thought, your heart was buried in a grave."

Geoffrey Dene's brow cleared.

"I am in mourning for my father," he said, promptly. "I grieved for him truly; but he had passed the allotted seventy years—he had long wanted to join my mother—so, Bee, my heart is not buried in his grave. You

are my first love, my darling; you will be my last. For years of my life I stood, as I believed, face to face with death. I never dreamed that love and marriage, a home and joys such as other men know, were for me; but, Beatrice, I went to see a physician last week, and he assures me, with care, I may make old bones yet. 'I don't see why you should not reach seventy,' was the way he put it. So, my dearest, if only you will give yourself to me I think we may look forward to many happy years together, and you will be the sunshine of a life that has been chiefly shadow."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. DRAKE and Miss Charlotte were amazed when they heard Bee's secret, while, armed with a very blushing happy face as she went into the parlour for a few minutes on her way upstairs.

It only wanted half-an-hour of dinner, but the two ladies forgot everything in the excitement of the tidings, and discussed the engagement with very anxious faces.

"I like Mr. Dene," said the gentle mother, "but we know nothing whatever about him. He has, he confesses, bad health; and two hundred a year is a very small income. I really don't know what to say."

"I always felt mischief would come of it," observed Miss Charlotte, "that young man ought to have been labelled 'dangerous'! I'm sure I've had awful fears he'd propose to Beryl, but I did think Beatrice was safe."

"If I refused my consent," suggested Mrs. Drake, "Bee is a dutiful daughter, and—"

"And you would break her heart," said Miss Charlotte, "that's flat. Of course I knew she would find out Noel Arden wasn't worth regretting some day, and discover she could love again; but somehow I always thought she would fix on a grand stately-looking man years older than herself. I never dreamed she would fancy love in a cottage a second time. You can't refuse, Alice, two hundred a year settled on her is not so bad for a penniless girl; and, perhaps, as she has a great influence over those she loves, Bee will rouse Mr. Dene up, and persuade him to do something."

"I should have been very sorry to refuse my consent," said Mrs. Drake, "for I like him very much. And as to settlements, my poor husband couldn't settle a penny on me, and we were very happy."

"The match will have to be," said Miss Charlotte, oracularly; "but I did think, after her misfortune with Noel Arden, Bee would have done better."

But pretty Miss Drake had come into the room and caught the last words.

"I don't want to do better, Cousin Charlotte. I wouldn't change Geoff for a nobleman with ten thousand a year; and you'll see we shall be the happiest couple of your acquaintance."

"On less than four pounds a week," said Miss Hall, doubtfully. "Well, Bee, you will have to study economy in good earnest, for Mr. Dene hasn't a notion of it. I'm sure his clothes alone must cost a pretty penny, he is so dreadfully careless about them."

That evening, quite late, when the other boarders had dispersed, Mr. Dene came up to the parlour to plead his cause with Mrs. Drake, and he did not find Bee's mother obdurate.

"Only make her happy," pleaded the gentle widow. "I am fond of all my children. Mr. Dene, but Beatrice is the flower of the flock."

His eye kindled.

"I know, and I am unworthy such a treasure, but if love can make her happy, dear Mrs. Drake, her happiness will be assured."

"And you can't be married for ages," said Miss Charlotte, firmly. "You've only known each other two months; and besides, Mr. Dene, you really ought—in view of such a serious step as marriage—to seek some occupation."

Geoff smiled.

"I've heard of something," he said, cheerfully. "There's a small agency going begging. Not such a snug berth as Meredith's, but one that brings in two hundred a year, so it would double my income, and I think I'm sure of it."

"I thought you didn't understand accounts?" snapped Miss Charlotte.

"I don't; but, you see, this is only an under-stewardship. Meredith would be my superior, and I think he'd coach me up in the mechanical part when he returns. Anyway, I had this letter this morning. I thought it would convince you I am not a hopeless fainter."

Miss Charlotte put on her gold-rimmed eyeglasses, and read the letter aloud. A faint smile curved Mr. Dene's lips, and yet, what could there have been to amuse him in the scene?

"Errolsdene Castle,
Near Bineford, Surrey."

"DEAR SIR,—"

"Respecting your application for the under-stewardship of my estate, I leave the selection entirely to the head steward. He is present abroad, but you have my full permission to tell his substitute, Mr. Grant, that if you appear to him competent for the post your appointment would be most acceptable to myself. As I have such a strong personal regard for Mr. Meredith, I should like to be of use to any friend of his. Yours faithfully,
"ERROLSDENE."

"I feel pretty sure of it," said Geoffrey, cheerfully.

"Mr. Grant may have a protégé of his own to recommend," suggested Miss Charlotte, cheerfully.

"I shall go and see him to-morrow; only somehow, Mrs. Drake, I couldn't go until I had spoken to Bee. I only care about this for her sake."

The old ladies gave in. So far as consent of theirs could speed his wooing, he might make sure of it; and when he went on to tell them his friend Meredith would be back—contrary to all expectation—in September, and that he should have to commence his new duties on the first of October, before they knew what they were about they had given their consent to a very quick wedding in September.

"He'll be just perfect as a brother-in-law," said Beryl, who, as youngest, was allowed to express her feelings very frankly; "but, Bee, he looks much too grand for a sub-staff. He's ten times more distinguished-looking than Mr. Meredith, who, I suppose, will be over him, so to say."

"He looks like a disinherited noble or an exiled prince," agreed Bee, proudly; "but, Beryl, I don't mind what he is so long as we belong to each other."

The youngest Miss Drake threw up her hands in mock alarm.

"There's Katy gone in for love in a cottage, and you following her example. Our dear Mary seems bitten with the independence of women, and talks of earning her living as a female lecturer. If either of us is to fulfil the gipsy's prophecy, Beatrice, I rather think it'll have to be me."

Long years before, when at a picnic, the kind old doctor had had his fortune told, the gipsy, after various high-flown predictions, wound up by declaring that though he would live and die in Northoot himself, one of his children would move among the richest of the land, and marry a peer of England.

Once, for a brief time, when Noel Arden wrote of the unexpected deaths which had made him his cousin's heir-presumptive, the Drake girls had said cheerfully Bee would fulfil the gipsy's prophecy, and thus there was something in fortune-telling after all; for months now they had not dared to allude to it, and Beryl's laughing speech showed how well she realised the new love had driven out

every remembrance of the old wound from Bee's heart.

"It will be you," said Bee, cheerfully. "You shall come on a long visit to us, Beryl, and we will introduce you to Lord Errolsdene—that is, if earls are in the habit of visiting their sub-bailiffs, on which point I am rather hazy."

Of course the engagement was announced not only to the inhabitants of the White House and friends in Northcot, but to the absent brothers and sisters.

Bee had no cause to complain of lack of congratulations. All those who had known her from her childhood declared with one voice that Mr. Dene was worthy of her; and her brothers wrote their heartiest, best wishes, declaring that the man Bee had accepted, and cousin Charlotte tolerated, must be something of a *vers avis*.

Kate Marston did more—she left her step-children and the wonderful baby, and came to have a long talk with the bride-elect.

"I liked him from the first moment I saw him," she said, frankly; "only he looked so sad, but you have done him good already, Bee. He looks quite ten years younger than when he came here first."

The pretty fiancée hid her face on her sister's lap.

"There's only one thing, Kitty: mother and cousin Charlotte think he ought to do something to make us richer, and he has never been used to work. If he made himself ill for my sake, I should never forgive myself."

But pretty Mrs. Marston laughed.

"It's worry kills, Bee—not work. Depend upon it Mr. Dene will be far happier with you, even if he has to toil a little, than leading an idle life without you. And now tell me, dear, when is it to be?"

"September, if Geoff gets this appointment; and I think he will, for Lord Errolsdene wrote him a very kind letter about it."

"Lord Errolsdene?"

"Yes. Why do you look surprised, Kitty? He is a very rich man. Mr. Meredith is his chief agent. You remember the Merediths were here a long time last summer?"

"I remember; but I never knew Lord Errolsdene was Mr. Meredith's employer."

"What does it matter? Surely you don't know anything about him to his discredit. Geoff says he is a trifle indolent, and rather too fond of solitude, but that he thinks I shall like him very much. For years the Earl had very bad health, and that gave him a disinclination for general society. Really, Kitty, I wish you would not stare at me like that! If you know anything against Lord Errolsdene, I'd much rather you told me plainly."

"But I don't," said Kitty, rather amused at her sister's petulance. "It's only that—I suppose you have forgotten, Bee—once, for a little while, we thought you would perhaps some day be Lady Errolsdene yourself."

Bee blushed crimson.

"I never heard the name of the peerage. Of course I remember there were but two lives between Captain Arden and the title. You can't mean it is Errolsdene?"

"Yes. The old Earl died some months ago; unless his son marries and leaves a child, that odious Captain Arden is his heir."

But Beatrice could actually hear the news unmoved. Nay, she was smiling.

"From what Geoff tells me of the Earl, I should say he had taken a new lease of life, so we need not fear having the Captain at the Castle yet. Then, I have been hatching quite a pretty little plot. I have been telling Beryl she must come on a long visit to us and steal the Earl's heart."

Kitty stopped and kissed her sister. She said not another word of Captain Arden's chances, but she went home with the firm conviction that Beatrice would not care if Noel became king of England, so long as she was left in peaceful possession of Geoffrey's love.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is an old-fashioned doctrine which avers "sin brings its own punishment." Noel Arden—he had dropped the "Captain" on his return to England—would have been ready to express his faith in it, for most assuredly he had gained neither peace nor happiness by forsaking the girl he loved and marrying another for her gold.

Poor, pretty, childish Blanche soon discovered her husband did not love her, and the knowledge broke her heart, not with one cruel stroke, but slowly and surely.

She was not skilled in the ways of the world, poor little thing! She never guessed that had she treated her husband with a little wholesome indifference, and made herself a name in the gay world as a beauty and leader of fashion, he might perhaps have been won, after all. She was too simple for that, poor little thing!

She loved him with all her heart, and she did not know how to dissemble her affection. Her beautiful eyes followed him in public with a pleading wistfulness; she yielded to his every wish, never asked for those attentions she had a right to demand, and, as a consequence, the man, who was incapable of appreciating such humility, despised his child-wife, and Blanche faded day by day until everyone except her careless, pleasure-loving husband, could see that she was slowly passing away.

"I don't think Noel's wicked to her," said Lady Barbara, who was sharp-sighted; "but he neglects her shamefully, and instead of reproaching him, and making a scene as most brides would, she has just brooded over it till it's killing her!"

"Good gracious, Barbara!" said the Major, much distressed at this opinion of his outspoken spouse, "I hope it's not as bad as that. The child's only drooping from the hot weather. She'll be as well as ever when the autumn comes."

"Blanche is Indian born, and revels in the heat. The autumn will probably find her gone, and even if not, no change of season can cure a broken heart."

"But, Barbara, it will be a very awkward thing for Noel."

My lady raised her eyebrows slightly.

"They won't have him up for murder," she said, coldly. "A man may break his wife's spirit and bruise her heart without offending against the law a tittle."

"Do be serious," said the Major, fustily. "If Blanche dies he loses every penny of her fortune. The allowance from Mr. Olive would stop at once, and her dower goes back to her own family. Noel would be as badly off as he was a year ago, in fact worse, for the price of his commission is gone, and he would have no means of earning money."

Lady Barbara shrugged her shoulders.

"If that is true, why didn't he take more care of his wife?"

"I don't believe he has an idea anything ails her. Noel is a careless fellow but not a bad-hearted one."

"Well," said my lady, drily, "you'd better give him a hint. If he is left a disconsolate widower, he might find it difficult to get along till he comes into the possession of Errolsdene."

"I shouldn't be surprised if he never came into that," said the Major, savagely. "That sickly young man seems to have taken a new lease of life since his father's death. He'll outlive Noel now, if the lad isn't careful."

The "hint" was administered that very day, and Noel Arden took it in very bad part.

"I don't know what you are talking of, sir. Blanche is perfectly happy, at least she ought to be. She has her own way in everything, I never interfere."

But when he went home that night and noticed how thin and pale his girl-wife had grown, and how languid was her step, he began to fancy there must be something in the warning after all.

"I don't think London suits you, Blanche, we'll go away next week."

But she showed no pleasure.

"We've only just come back from staying with Lady Barbara, Noel, and I'd rather be at home."

"We won't go and stay with anyone," he answered, kindly. "I'll take you down to the Isle of Wight, and we'll have a pretty little house just for our two selves. It's so warm down there you'll be able to fancy you're in India, and when we go sailing trips round the island you'll soon get your colour back."

"But it will be so dull for you."

"Not a bit of it. I shall enjoy it awfully. We haven't seen much of each other lately, Blanche, and it will be just like a second honeymoon."

It was not that, for the veil had fallen from her eyes, and never again could she regard him as the knight and hero she had once believed him; but for all that it was a pleasant, tranquil time—the happiest Blanche had known for months.

Noel, his fears once awakened, became really anxious, and behaved like a model husband, so that August slipped away like a dream of peace to the little wife.

But if Noel thought all danger past, he was mistaken.

Blanche caught a sudden cold, and the nearest doctor was called in. He naturally had great experience in the fell disease whose victims flock to Ventnor every year; and he told Mr. Arden plainly cure was impossible. Mrs. Arden might linger a few weeks, but she was far advanced in consumption, and the cold of winter would be fatal to her. And the doctor proved a true prophet: before September was half through Noel Arden found himself a widower.

Every penny of Blanche's fortune reverted to her father, and her husband was much worse off than when he had reflected so gloomily over his future in India, and decided that nothing but a rich marriage could save him.

By a strange coincidence the day of Blanche's death was the eve of Beatrice Drake's wedding; and when she and her husband had reached London, where they intended to pass their honeymoon, Geoffrey read the announcement in the paper. His wife watched his face change, and bent over him to see what he was reading.

"On the 20th, at St. Ronan's, Ventnor, aged eighteen, Blanche, the beloved wife of Noel Arden, and only child of Douglas Olive, of Calcutta."

"Poor little thing! but she did not look happy, Geoff, that day we saw her. Perhaps it was better for her to go than learn to know her husband as he is."

"Perhaps," answered Geoff. He could not doubt the love shining in Bee's blue eyes. He could not insult her by speaking the fear which had troubled him for just a moment. "Would she have come to him had she suspected her old lover would so soon be free?"

Many wedding presents had poured in upon Mrs. Geoffrey Dene; but thus far the bridegroom seemed to have been very much left out in the cold.

No single offering had come from any of Mr. Dene's friends or kindred, and the only letter of congratulation Bee received from any one who knew him was not accompanied by any present.

The writer of this letter was Mrs. Meredith, and her note was so excited and incoherent that pretty Miss Drake decided the failure to prove herself her uncle's heiress had quite upset her.

"You have taken our breath away," wrote the kind-hearted matron; "for years our one wish for Mr. Dene was that he should marry; but we never dreamed of his winning a wife so charming as yourself. We shall meet in Surrey, I hope, very soon, for we shall be back again by the first of October. Charles says I am not to write any more or I shall be sure and say too much; but though we may never be close friends again—I suppose our positions won't allow it—I am thankful from the bottom

of my heart that you two have come together."

"I don't think she need have said that," was Bee's comment to Geoffrey as she read the note to him. "There may be a gulf between an agent and sub-agent; but, surely, it is not so enormous that their wives can't go on being friends."

Geoff laughed cheerfully.

"Mrs. Meredith got excited, and did not write clearly," he said. "I am quite sure, Bee, she rests with you to continue the friendship if you like. She is really very fond of you."

"Well," said Bee, with just a *soupcçon* of nervousness. "I hope she won't be always talking about positions."

"She won't be! Now, Beatrice, which shall we do? Go down to Binefield before the Merediths return, or wait till they are at home to welcome us?"

"We'll wait, please," decided Bee, quickly; "if we went first we might have to call on them to welcome them home. If we wait a few days, why, they'll have to make the first advance; only Geoff, weren't you obliged to begin work on the first of October?"

"Any day next month will do. Shall we say the tenth?"

"Very well, Geoff, I haven't asked you much about Binefield."

"My dear, do you want to know anything?"

"Is our house near the Merediths?"

"About two miles."

"Oh!" there was a little thrill of relief. "I was afraid we should be next door, and if she means to snub me that would be horrid."

"She won't snub you. Meredith's house is two miles from ours, and the same distance from Errolsdene Castle."

"And you said our house was furnished, that we need not buy anything?"

"It's furnished," he answered, "but some of the things are very old, and you may not like them; still I think we'd better wait till you have had a good look round before we buy anything."

Beatrice agreed. She was very anxious to see her new home, though it must be confessed Mrs. Meredith's letter had damped some of her pleasurable anticipations.

Bee's desire was to arrive at Nuffield, the nearest station, about five; but Mr. Dene preferred a later train, saying it was much pleasanter to get to a fresh place quite towards evening, so that one began one's first impressions after a good night's rest. He seemed almost as nervous in his way as Bee, and with reckless extravagance secured a carriage to themselves by presenting the guard with half a sovereign.

They did not talk much; but Geoff held his wife's hand and whispered once or twice she was not to trouble about Binefield, because, if she did not like it, nothing would induce him to live there. At last, when the next station would be theirs, Geoff said, in a very tremulous voice,—

"If all is not as you expect, Bee, will you forgive me?"

She nestled the least bit closer to him.

"Don't talk like that, Geoff. If the house is a four roomed cottage I shall be content, Dear, don't you know you make my house now?"

Lord Errolsdene had sent his own brougham for the travellers, which struck the bride as a most kindly act of attention, since a seven-miles drive in a country fly is not the pleasantest of experiences. Geoff left the luggage to the Earl's footman, as nonchalantly as though he had been used to the service of such a retainer all his life, but Bee forgot to reproach him for his idleness.

She leant back in her corner a little tired, far too tired, in fact, to be curious about the outside world. She would see it to-morrow, till then she could wait. They were going through the park now, probably the sub-bailiff's cottage was beyond it on the other side; but the brougham stopped abruptly, the

footman flung open the door, and Geoff handed out his wife, and led her up some steps to a grand porticoed door, which stood open, a flood of light coming from the large oak hall beyond.

With Bee's fingers resting on his arm, Geoffrey addressed the long line of servants gathered in the hall, and presented to them their new mistress, "My wife, the Countess of Errolsdene!" and then he led her on to a little room at the end of a long corridor, furnished as a boudoir, and bright with fire and lamplight. Here he put her in a low chair close to the hearth, and bending over her, asked kindly,—

"Can you ever forgive me, sweetheart?"

She looked up bewildered.

"I don't understand, Geoff. Who are you?"

"Alan Geoffrey Dene, fourteenth Earl of Errolsdene. Bee, forgive me, I ought to have told you long ago; but I was afraid you would refuse to have anything more to do with me if you knew I was Noel Arden's first cousin!"

She let her pretty head fall on his shoulder.

"I don't mind whether you are Lord Errolsdene or his sub-bailiff. I know you are my love!"

It was a very simple explanation after all. On his father's death the young Earl had resolved to break through the formal parade of rank which had always surrounded him, and see whether he could not win friends for himself without the assistance of his wealth and title.

His father had warned him specially against his cousin Noel, giving as a proof of Captain Arden's baseness the story of his treatment of Miss Drake. Later on, hearing from the Merediths of their pleasant stay at the White House, Geoff resolved to go there himself and make acquaintance with the girl his cousin had so cruelly wronged.

The young Earl was far too noble to fancy money could atone for Captain Arden's treachery; but, all the same, he resolved, if he found the family in want, to manage to send Mrs. Drake anonymously such a sum as should make her comfortable for life. He came to the White House with no other feeling but pity. He fell in love with Bee before he had known her a week. The letter he showed her was not a forgery, but one he himself had actually written to a young man who aspired to the post of assistant to Mr. Meredith.

"Oh!" said Bee, with a wonderful look of relief, when she had taken in Geoff's story, "now I understand Mrs. Meredith's letter."

"And you will go to-morrow and tell her you don't consider it impossible to continue your friendship?"

"What will cousin Charlotte say?"

"That as I am far too indolent ever to earn a fortune, it is a special providence I should have been born the heir to one!"

The news created as much wonder as Bee expected at the White House, while we may be very sure it was a bitter pill to Noel Arden to learn the girl he had forsaken was his cousin's wife.

In his own happiness the Earl could afford to be generous. He offered his kinsman an allowance of five hundred a year; provided he made no further claim on him, and this Noel grudgingly accepted, though to the present day he regards the Earl as having cruelly injured him.

He does not specify in what the injuries consist, but no doubt one is that the arrival of a little Viscount Dene and of two pretty little girls has quite cut off the sometime heir-presumptive from any chance of enjoying the peerage of Errolsdene.

And the Earl and Countess are happy, happier, it seems to Miss Charlotte, than the majority of married folk, for, though Lord Errolsdene is still a delicate man, his health causes his wife no serious anxiety, and Beatrice herself is as bright and charming as in the old days at Northcott, where she was known as

THE PRETTY MISS DRAKE.

HILDRED ELSINORE.

CHAPTER XI.

HUGH TREFUSIS did not have much chance of seeing more of the Warringtons' pretty niece, for very soon after that little dinner in Daffodil-road his leave of absence expired, and he had to join his regiment at Blankhampton, near which town he had an uncle and aunt residing, who, knowing the young soldier's expectations, were very much disposed to welcome him to their house and make him feel at home with their bevy of pretty daughters, any one of whom Mrs. Lindsay considered eminently suited to be the future mistress of Netherston Castle.

Mr. Lindsay was a lawyer, and one of his standing grievances was that Lady Tempest had not entrusted her affairs to his management.

The Mere was almost the only estate for miles round with which the prosperous solicitor had nothing to do; but this offence did not prevent his being one of the earliest callers upon Mr. Bertram, or his bidding his wife to issue cards for a dinner party at an early date in the new Squire's honour.

At this party Hugh Trefusis met the lonely master of the Mere. He had heard his history—which was in everyone's mouth—and pitied the man so many envied. The two seemed to take a mutual fancy to each other; and, in spite of eight or nine years between them, appeared likely to become close friends.

The young officer found plenty of leisure, and he enjoyed riding over to the Mere, where he always found a warm welcome. A game of billiards, a *à la carte* dinner with Bertram, enlivened, perhaps, by stories of his travels, suited Captain Trefusis a great deal better than his aunt's somewhat oppressive hospitality.

Hugh had an almost painfully clear sight, and very soon after his arrival at Blankhampton he knew perfectly he was expected to marry one of his cousins, and the discovery chafed him.

Now, at Tempest Mere there were no matrimonial traps for unwary feet—indeed, Mr. Bertram was a fellow sufferer. Only Trefusis, who grew very irate when anyone made little schemes for himself, yet confessed it was Guy's manifest duty to find a wife.

"I shall not be here long," he said, cheerfully, "in two or three years we shall be stationed at the other end of England, and people will forget my existence; but it's different with you. You are to become, so to say, a 'son of the soil,' and you'll never be left in peace until you've chosen some one to share your prosperity."

Bertram coloured through his bronzed cheek, but he answered, curtly,—

"I've done with that sort of thing."

And it was after one of these conversations that Dr. Tucker's card was brought to him, and he had to listen to the story of Nan Robson's illness.

Trefusis kept silent for the most part till the doctor left them; but when they were once more alone he brought down his fist on the table with a bang, and cried, impulsively,—

"By George, what a scoundrel the beggar must be!"

Mr. Bertram smiled languidly at his friend's impetuosity.

"After all I have suffered at Clarence Maitland's hands it's not particularly pleasant to be accused of murdering him. I don't believe the doctor half credited my denial. Fancy a medical man putting faith in a sick girl's delicious ravings!"

"It wasn't that," said Hugh, quickly. "I am sure Dr. Tucker believed you, Bertram. He only came because he was so interested in his patient that he wouldn't leave a stone unturned in his efforts to find her lover."

"Maitland was a good-looking fellow," said Guy Bertram, thoughtfully, "I don't wonder

at a girl's being taken with him; but to break her heart because of his absence is ridiculous."

The light tone jurred on Trefusis.

"I fancy all good women love deeply where they love at all," said the young soldier. "When I listened to Dr. Tooker I felt as though I would have done anything to find Mairland, and force him to go back, but I can see now it would be no real kindness."

"Why not," asked Bertram, quietly, "if the girl is breaking her heart for him?"

Trefusis hesitated.

"From your own story Claude Mairland must be a villain, and a true-hearted woman tied to him for life would soon have her eyes opened. Better, poor child, that she should die believing in him."

"Her friend, the doctor, evidently did not agree with you. It's strange when you come to think of it, Trefusis, what can have become of the fellow. Men don't vanish mysteriously now-a-days, and leave no clue to their fate."

"It must have been your fifty pounds. I mean the fifty pounds given him for finding your address. I expect he was tired of a stay-at-home life, and went out to the gold diggings or somewhere like that, hoping to make a pile."

Bertram yawned.

"I hope he'll stay there to spend it when he's made it," said Bertram, lazily. "I'm sure England's better off without him. What are you looking at your watch for, Trefusis? It's quite early yet."

"I'm under a solemn engagement to dine at Rosemount," said the Captain, with a smile. "I understood my aunt you had promised to come too."

"I believe I did," and Bertram half sighed; "but there's time enough yet. That doctor's visit has given me the blues, and I don't feel fit for ladies' society." Here he rung the bell savagely. "Brandy and soda-water. Charles," he told the footman, who appeared, "and glasses for two."

"Not for me," said Trefusis, rigidly. "I don't need any stimulants, Bertram."

With a slight feeling of alarm he watched the very liberal amount of brandy which Gay Bertram poured out. To his surprise his friend drank a little neat before he added a small medium of soda-water. As a rule the master of the Chase was a most temperate man; now his hands shook so that he could hardly hold the tumbler. Clearly, Dr. Tooker's visit and the talk about his false friend had thoroughly upset him.

"I am better now," said Bertram, coolly, as he put the empty glass back upon the tray. "I shall be all right by the time we get back to Rosemount. I like your uncle very much, he is such a good hater."

Trefusis laughed.

"I can see he has been boring you over his pet grievance—Lady Tempest taking her business elsewhere. It's absurd of him to mind, for he has the best practices in Blankhampton, and only the three girls to provide for."

"And very pretty girls they are," replied Mr. Bertram. "I am not a ladies' man, but I can admire a charming face still, and I never saw three nicer girls than the Miss Lindseys."

Perhaps, as their cousin, Hugh felt able to speak his mind freely, for he rejoined,—

"They're well enough, but they are always just the same."

Bertram opened his eyes.

"I thought that a most estimable quality; surely you don't admire people who change with every wind that blows?"

"I don't like fickle people, but girls can be natural. My cousins always say just what one would expect. You could guess their answers beforehand, and if your eyes were shut you would not know which of the three was talking."

"You surprise me, I thought—"

"Oh, I know what you thought," said Trefusis, blantly. "Everyone seems to have

taken up the idea that I am going to marry one of my cousins."

"And aren't you?"

"Most certainly not. To begin with, I'm not going to marry anyone just yet, and if I wanted to choose a wife I should pick out one who hadn't two doubloes. I like the Lindseys very much as cousins, but I've no wish to be nearer to them."

"Then you intend to look out for a beauty so remarkable that no one can approach her."

"No, I don't," retorted Trefusis, "but if I marry I shall choose a girl with a mind of her own, and whose tastes and conversation don't all run on dress and amusement. A wife should be a companion, not an animated fashion-plate."

"Spoken like a book," said Bertram, laughing; "but did you—in these degenerate days—ever meet such a creature?"

"I did once. Oh! you need not look at me like that. I'm not in love with her. I never saw her, but once. I never spoke a word to her except on the most ordinary subjects—only I know she had a heart and intellect. She was gentle enough to sympathize with anyone in trouble, but her thoughts did not run all in one groove like a dressed up doll. I daresay I shall never set eyes on her again; but all the same, I find myself comparing every woman I meet with her—and they are generally wanting!"

"And this rara avis—where did you see her?"

"In London."

"London is a wide place."

Trefusis smiled in spite of himself, and the last touch of his ill-humour vanished with that smile.

"Oh, I don't mind telling you. I can stand being laughed at. She was the daughter of a country parson, and she had come up to stay with her uncle Warrington, the rising barrister. Quite by chance he invited me to dinner the night of her arrival. She was just a little village girl with a frightened face, and an old-fashioned dress that might have been her grandmother's; but, all the same, Hildred Elsinore had a soul, an intelligence. I have never seen anyone so near my ideal."

"It is a pretty name."

"Yes; her father is Rector of Little Nether-ton. If I ever come in for my cousin's property, I shall be their next door neighbour. I fancy Mr. Elsinore has been married twice. He has nine children, all girls, and the value of the living—I looked it up—is exactly two hundred a year."

"Poor devil!"

"There's something wrong about things," said Trefusis, thoughtfully. "My allowance is double that without counting my pay, and I've only one to feed. Mr. Elsinore has eleven."

"Don't be a socialist," rejoined Mr. Bertram. "No doubt living is cheap in the country, and girls don't cost near so much as boys."

The speech jarred on Trefusis. He admired Gay Bertram extremely, he liked him very truly, but he was dimly conscious that when they left the region of small talk and touched on serious topics they did not think alike. Bertram had a cynical, jeering way of looking at things which the younger man disliked, even while he made allowances for Gay and tried to believe that the sorrow of his earlier years, and all he had suffered through a false friend, was at the bottom of his sneers.

The two young men were the last to arrive of Mrs. Lindsay's guests. It was a large dinner-party; but as the family numbered five, not many guests were needed to make up the dozen who sat down to enjoy the lawyer's hospitality. The Vicar of Coppleigh Chase and his wife, the doctor, young and unmarried, and a bridal pair from Blankhampton made up the number.

It was rather a difficult party to pair off. On ordinary occasions Mrs. Lindsay would have taken Gay Bertram herself, and given

the other bachelors to two of her daughters, but to-night Mr. and Mrs. Vere must have the places of honour beside their host and hostess. So there was nothing for it but to give the vicar the eldest Miss Lindsay, and bestow Gay upon the vicar's wife, while the younger daughters were happy in having each an eligible suitor.

Ada Smith was the one person near Coppleigh who disliked Gay Bertram, here was the only voice which did not sing his praises; but the little lady had a great deal of tact, and, though her life had been spent in a dull country place, possessed perfect breeding. She and Mr. Bertram met at Rosemount on common ground as Mrs. Lindsay's guests, and since the Master of the Mers had been told off to her, it was her place to make herself as agreeable to him as possible. She would have been surprised had she known that Gay Bertram had specially intended to secure a *tête-à-tête* with her, and regarded it as a benediction from Providence when he was requested by their hostess to take her down to dinner—yes so it was.

"Do you know," he began, when conversation round the table had become too general for them to be overheard, "you have never once been to see me, Mrs. Smith?"

Ada opened her eyes.

"Ladies do not usually visit bachelors," was her prompt reply.

"Oh, but surely bachelors need not be so shunned that a husband may not bring his wife to lunch with them. Mr. Smith has favoured me with his company two or three times, but you never."

"I am a good deal engaged," said Ada, coldly, "and the Mers has painful associations for me."

"So I can understand." He paused a moment. "And do you think the old place is not peopled with ghosts for me? Though I never saw it in happier days, do you think I am not haunted by the picture of Blanche Tempest slowly fading away beneath her mother's harshness, or that I cannot see the old lady in her bitter repentance mourning over the past, through the long years she spent alone after her child's death?"

Ada hesitated.

"I thought you did not care."

"You wronged me."

"No! To be faithful to the dead is not in man's nature. How could I tell that after all these years you remembered her?"

"And so you have been punishing me for my supposed breach of faith. Will you turn over a new leaf, Mrs. Smith, dating from to-night, and promise to be my friend?"

He spoke persuasively. There was a ring of feeling in his deep, musical voice, his beautiful eyes were fixed entrancingly on her face; and yet, will it be believed? Ada Smith felt no remorse for her doubts of this man. Even now in her secret heart she felt that he was acting a part—though for what end she could not say.

"You have no lack of friends, Mr. Bertram," she said, simply, "and I am a plain home-keeping woman, who cannot have much in common with you."

"You have this," he answered, fervently. "You were Blanche's friend. We both loved her, surely that ought to draw us together."

A servant came up to offer an *entree* to Mrs. Smith, and for a moment she seemed to give the dish he presented all her thoughts. No one could have guessed she was really weighing an important question—was Gay Bertram to be trusted or not? She had settled the point when she turned to him again.

"I wonder you don't go away."

"Whatever for?" It was his turn to look surprised. "Where should I go?"

She looked at him keenly.

"You must have had other friends, and other interests to fill your life since you parted from Blanche."

"Even so, and then—?"

"The friends do not come here," she said steadily. "The interests have not followed

you to Tempest Mere, and you don't seem to make any fresh ones for yourself, so it would be natural if you went back to London."

"I am going."

It was impossible to tell from his manner whether the plan was an old one long since formed, or whether he had only made it on the spur of the moment; Ada Smith would have given a great deal to know.

"Shall you be back for Christmas?"

"Probably. Mrs. Smith, I know you don't like me. I feel you distrust me. Perhaps, when you hear the object of my journey you will admit I am not quite so black as you have painted me in your mind. I am going to seek Mr. Elsinore, and offer to his daughter a share of her grandparent's wealth."

"You really mean it?"

"I do. As you are doubtless aware, unless I have a son within the next five years I only possess a life interest in the estate, and am powerless to alienate any portion of it, and at my death all passes to Lady Tempest's next of kin."

"To Hildred Elsinore," said Mrs. Smith. "Poor Lucy had only one child. The rest of Mr. Elsinore's family are by his second wife, and have no claim whatever upon the Tempest property."

"Just so. Well, some day this Hildred will be a great heiress, but, as I may live another thirty years, she might have to waste the best part of her life in poverty before she came in for her inheritance. I propose, therefore, to make her a fixed annual allowance."

Mrs. Smith felt perplexed.

"It will be a real charity," she said, gravely, "for I know they are miserably poor."

"And they must hate me pretty violently," said Bertram, with a smile. "Well, I leave Tempest Mere to-morrow, and I shall not return to it until I have arranged matters with the Rector of Little Netherston."

"I suppose he is still alive?"

"Oh, yes."

"You see, no one has heard anything of the Elsinores for years. Lady Tempest told me once she should have made Hildred her heiress, only that the Rector had married again, and she did not choose to enrich his second family."

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. ELINORE had consented to her step-child's visit to London because, in her jealous love for her own brood, she felt she wanted her husband and her home free from the firstborn, on whom the Rector—she knew—lavished his fondest love; but after Hildred's absence had lasted a month her step-mother would gladly have recalled her.

To begin with, useless as she always declared Hildred to be, it was certain that from the moment of her departure other people found their labours grow suddenly heavier.

Martha, still weak from the fever, declared it was impossible to teach the children in addition to her domestic duties.

Mrs. Elsinore tried turning governess herself, lost her patience the first morning, and flung the book at her pupils in a tantrum. As for the Rector's study, it became a scene of great confusion, since no one now even attempted to dust or tidy it.

The servant grumbled from morning to night; and, in fact, times were so stormy at the Rectory that Mrs. Elsinore began dimly to realise that Hildred's gentle spirit had been the means of keeping peace and order, and that in her way she was quite as useful as her more bustling younger sister.

David Gibson, too, provoked Mrs. Elsinore without measure. Instead of transferring his affections to Martha as the mother had expected, he arranged with his father for his next brother to take his place at the Highlands, and actually went abroad.

Mrs. Elsinore called it "folly," but Mrs.

Gibson retorted she had a brother settled in Sydney, and seeing the world never did a young man any harm. If David liked to spend six months in the colony among his stranger relations, well, they could afford to pay his expenses, and when he did buckle to he would work none the worse.

The Rector went about with a grave face and eyes which always seemed to be seeking something.

He tried hard to hide from his wife that he missed Hildred at every turn, but he could not succeed; and the angry woman registered it as another offence against the absent girl.

But one thing comforted her—Hildred had to work. Mrs. Elsinore did not know very much of schools; but she had a vague idea that the life of a pupil-teacher was not all roses. When Mrs. Warrington was tired of her visitor, and "placed her out," the young lady would have a hardish time of it.

But when August was waning, and Mrs. Elsinore daily expected to hear what school Hildred was to enter, she received a shock to her feelings.

Bessie Warrington wrote to the Rector (his wife thought the letter should have been addressed to her) offering to keep her niece entirely, and provide for her in all respects as her own child.

"We have both grown very fond of Hildred," wrote the lady, "and Dick says he will afford her the best musical instruction to be had in London, so that if anything happened to him she might be able to support herself; but I do not think that would be necessary. Hildred is too pretty not to marry, and to marry well."

There was no hiding the offer from Mrs. Elsinore, and she was simply furious. To begin with she had really found out how much she missed Hildred's services. If it had been a question of sparing her to go as music-teacher in a school, she would have yielded, confident that, as soon as she earned a salary, part of it would find its way to Little Netherston; but to spare her to live in idleness, and "marry well" was quite another thing.

Why should Hildred be a fashionable young lady while her sisters were almost starving? asked Mrs. Elsinore, stung into bitter words. Had not the other girls as much claim on the Warringtons? She wouldn't have it; Hildred should come home, and take her chance with the rest!

Charles Elsinore did his best; he reminded her how poor they were, that the expense of the long illness in the spring had forced him to borrow money, which must be repaid at whatever cost. Would it not be better to leave Hildred where she was, well-cared for and happy, rather than bring another mouth to share their scanty fare?

It was throwing words away; Mrs. Elsinore had made up her mind Hildred should not accept her aunt's offer, which would ensure her a position far above her sisters.

The second wife was a hot-tempered violent-spoken woman, whilst the Rector was mild and easily subdued. He did his best, but he was hopelessly overruled. All he could obtain was that Hildred might stay out her three months.

Mrs. Elsinore herself conveyed their decision to her sister-in-law; and if the hope of invitation for her own brood made her latter civil in language, there was no mistaking its quiet determination.

"They were miserably poor," she wrote; "and Hildred's services were absolutely required at home, unless by the sacrifice of them they could feel the girl was earning money to help her father. Besides, why should one sister live in luxury while the others had hardly enough food? A visit was one thing, and they were all grateful to Mrs. Warrington for her kindness. They only wished such a holiday was possible for the others; but as to letting Hildred grow up an idle young lady, it was impossible?"

This letter was delivered to Bessie Warrington by the evening post, and she said not a

word about it until Hildred had gone to bed; then she put it into her husband's hand, with the remark, "That woman must be a virago. Poor Charles! why did he marry her?"

Mr. Warrington read the letter through very carefully; the flicker of a smile played about his mouth as he reread it.

"Dick, it is cruel of you to laugh!"

"My dear Bessie, I can't help it. Mrs. Elsinore is a clever woman, but she has over-reached herself. Can't you see what she is driving at?"

"Getting Dreda home, I suppose."

"Not only that; she wants to send one of her own girls here in Hildred's place. She seems to think we live in luxurious splendour (the idea's rather amusing), and does not choose Hildred should be favoured by sharing it. Depend upon it, wife, if Hildred goes home, and we ask none of the others, Mrs. Elsinore will change her mind!"

"But—"

"I know," he said kindly, "you are fond of the little girl, and would like to keep her here; so should I, but you must consider her father, Bessie. Mrs. Elsinore must have bullied him pretty badly before he let her write this letter. I should say his life would be made a misery to him until Hildred's return."

"It is so hard!"

"It is very hard; but we shall only make things worse for Hildred by provoking Mrs. Elsinore; and Bessie," he added comically, "if seventeen years of her step-mother's rule couldn't prevent the child from growing up the dainty little lady she is, I don't think a few months more can do her any harm."

"A few months—it may be years!"

"Oh no, it won't," Mrs. Elsinore will give in when she finds her plan doesn't work; and I shall speak to Hildred very plainly before she goes, and tell her we have always a home here for her."

"It is so good of you, Dick!"

"Is it?" replied Dick with a smile. "I'm fond of the child, Bessie. One thing I mean to make her understand: it may be her duty to go home now and try and help her father, but it's not her duty to stay at the Rectory if Mrs. Elsinore is unkind to her. Submission may be carried too far, and that child has the makings of a martyr."

"Well, we have a fortnight left," said Mrs. Warrington, hopefully.

"And you will buy Dreda a fresh present every day. Take my advice, Bessie, and don't."

"Why, Dick," exclaimed his wife, in surprise, "what do you mean?"

"Every extra thing you give the child will be an extra inducement to her step-mother not to let her come back. The pleasant Mrs. Elsinore fancies our life is, the more she will grudge Hildred her share of it."

His meaning broke on his wife suddenly.

"Oh, Dick, she must be a hateful woman. You mean she grudges Hildred everything as so much taken from her own girls?"

Mr. Warrington nodded. "That's it."

That Aunt Bessie softened the news of their coming separation to Hildred may be guessed, but she was not prepared for the girl's passionate grief at the thought of returning to Netherston.

"It is not because we are poor, and life is full of hard work," she said, brokenly, "you mustn't think that, aunty; but—mother hates me."

Mrs. Warrington quite believed her; but she would not say so.

"She prefers her own children, Dreda. It is hard for you, dear, but we must admit it is natural."

Hildred shook her head.

"It's not that, Aunt Bessie. Long ago, when I thought she was my own mother, it puzzled me just the same. I think she dreads my ever being happy. She seems to think everything I have is an injury to the others, and she can't forgive me for being father's favourite."

"When you have been at home a little



["IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THESE THREE MONTHS HAD BEEN A HAPPY DREAM!" SAID HILDRED, AS MRS. WARRINGTON STOOD AT THE CARRIAGE DOOR.]

while, Dreda, I shall try again to persuade them to let you come back."

Mr. Warrington spoke still more plainly one afternoon when taking Hildred for a walk, and they were secure from all interruptions.

"You are very gentle and self-denying, child; but you have a clear intellect, and so I am going to put the case before you very plainly, just as though it were a stranger's, and you must trust me, Dreda, enough to believe the advice I give you is sound, and just what I should offer to a client, not merely an opinion given because I am fond of you and want to make things easy for you."

Hildred looked up at him gratefully.

"I should always believe you, Uncle Dick."

"Well, then, little girl, I hope things will blow over, and that we shall soon have you back; but if not—" he hesitated—"if you stay any time at home, and Mrs. Elsinore is practically unkind to you, it is your duty to leave her. Teach the children, and do your best to help with the needlework; but if Mrs. Elsinore tries to make you into a household drudge, and gives you tasks beyond your strength—leave home."

Hildred looked frightened.

"What are you thinking of, uncle?"

"My dear girl, your mother was a lady. Your father's second wife is not, and never can be. What she dislikes in you is your unconscious superiority of birth, and I fear her trying to degrade you by hardships and rough work. Now, Hildred, I have told your aunt not to give you any parting present, but I have one for you myself. In this purse are three sovereigns. Keep them carefully till you need them. Never let Mrs. Elsinore know you possess the means of leaving her, but if things go very badly—come to us."

"But it wouldn't cost nearly that."

"My dear, you can't walk four miles to the station, and, it might be at night or a hundred things. Keep the money, Hildred; I should

give you more, only that I really believe it would embarrass you."

"I shall never forget how good you have been to me, Uncle Dick."

"Tut, tut," he said, cheerfully. "We have been very pleased to have such a sunbeam in the house. I tell you frankly, child, but for your father's sake I would not give you up; but it might make strife at home if we kept you after your step-mother's letter."

Mrs. Warrington was kinder than ever in those last few days; but acting on her husband's instructions she gave Dreda no parting gifts, and she even suggested one or two evening dresses she had bought for the girl should be left in Daffodil road ready for Hildred's return.

"I don't want your mother to think I have given you extravagant notions, Hildred; and if you leave the things behind I shall feel you are sure to come back."

Hildred understood the feeling perfectly. She did not mention a letter from Martha just then in her pocket.

"Mother says," wrote this astute young person, "you had better coax Aunt Bessie to buy you as many new clothes as possible, for even if I can't wear them they would alter for the others, and we are all as shabby as possible."

Hildred burnt that letter at the kitchen fire; not for worlds would she have let her aunt see it. As it happened she took very few clothes home with her. It was early autumn, and the pretty summer costumes her aunt had given her were left with the evening dresses in the wardrobe of her room in Daffodil-road. A very pretty blue serge, stylishly made, and a soft grey tweed were the only new gowns she carried away with her.

"It seems as though these three months had been a happy dream," said the poor child as she kissed Mrs. Warrington, who was standing at the door of the first-class carriage, where she had installed her niece. "Oh, Aunt Bessie, when shall I see you again?"

"Very soon, I hope, dear," said her aunt, cheerfully; "and, Hildred, remember to write and tell me everything, and whether the Castle is still shut up. I feel a special interest in it now I know it is to belong to Captain Trefusis."

It was a lovely September day, and as she went home from King's Cross Mrs. Warrington did a little shopping, but her heart was not in the work. She was feeling desperately uneasy.

"Of course it's utterly ridiculous, Dick," she told her husband that night after dinner. "Charles has loved Hildred all her life. I have known her only three months, so of course he ought to take as much care of her as I should, but I feel frightened."

Mr. Warrington was very kind. He did not attempt to laugh at his wife's fears, but asked her gently what she expected to happen to Hildred.

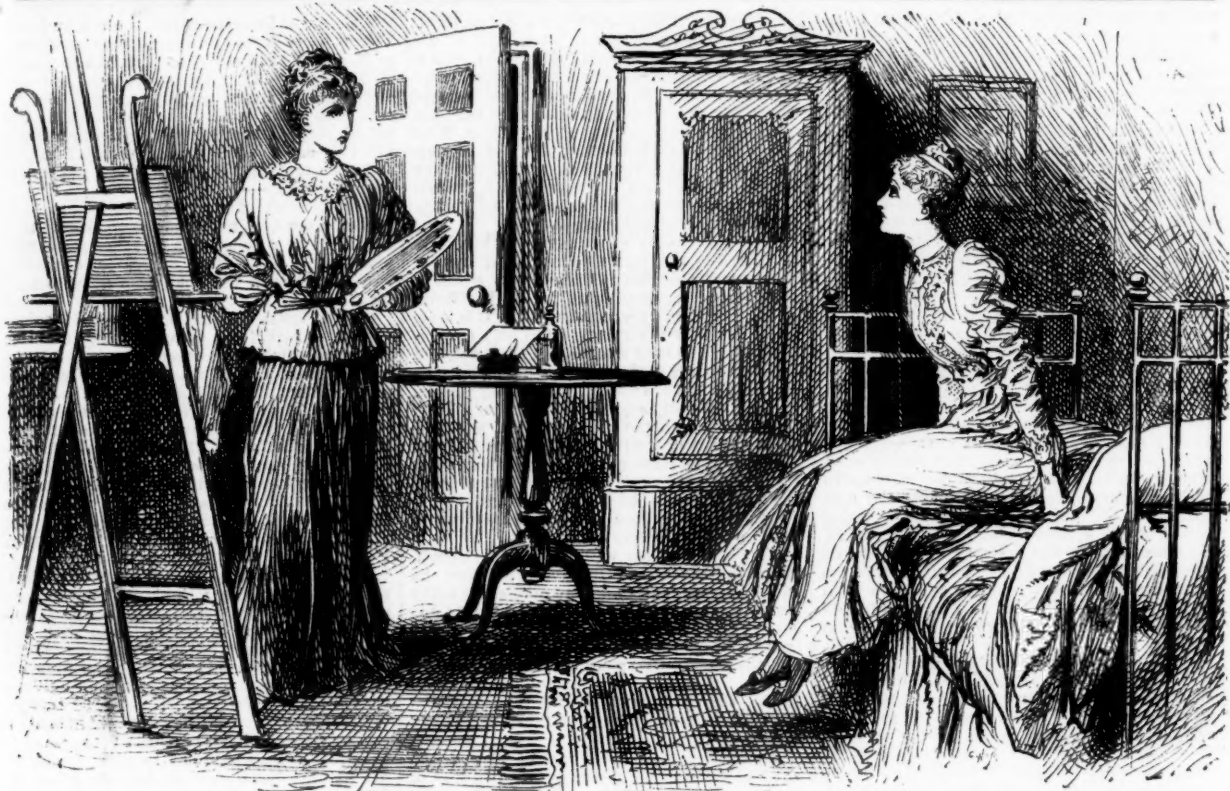
"I have no idea, only I feel as if some awful danger threatened her."

"If only they were better off," said the barrister, "we might offer to go and stay with them and see how things really were; but even a two days' visit would be a formidable expense to them, and Netherton is too far to run down for a few hours; but cheer up, Bessie, it'll all come right, and Hildred will be back before the year is out."

But the kindly prophecy was not destined to be fulfilled; Hildred Elsinore never again entered No. 5, Daffodil-road.

(To be continued.)

MANY of the dwellers of the deep seas have no eyes and are, therefore, unaffected by the total absence of light which is one of the characteristics of the great ocean depths. Others, besides having from one to a hundred eyes, carry torches of phosphorescent light, which nature has kindly provided for the denizens of the deep.



[VIOLET SAT DANGLING HER LITTLE BRONZE-COVERED SHOES TO AND FRO, WHILE HESTER STOOD IN THE SAME UNCOMPROMISING POSITION.]

TWO WOMEN.

CHAPTER V.

HESTER found herself practically a prisoner after that short unpleasant interview with her step-mother. Mrs. Campbell did not attempt to give her orders in person, she had them conveyed to the girl in a curtly-worded note; and Hester knew, without waiting for the future to develop itself, that her step-mother would take very good care that her arrangements should be well carried out.

The girl had always occupied one of the humblest of the rooms in the quaint big old house, she had gone to it the moment she arrived at Sedgebrooke from her convent school on the outskirts of Paris. The two years Hester had spent in this school had been the most peaceful, almost the happiest in her short, troubled existence.

There had been happy hours, delicious moments in her father's time, and there had been great sweetness in the love that existed so deeply, so passionately between parent and child; but somehow, despite this and despite her youth, Hester had acquired a knowledge of sorrow—she seemed to be fully aware of the shadow of regret, of despair, of death that hung ever above her beloved father's head. Child as she was, she was acutely sensitive, and she knew innately, as it were, that there was one spot in her father's heart she could never reach—one grief she could never solace—one cloud she could never chase away.

It was a curious kind of life she had led; almost when she was too young to walk alone she was installed by her father as his sole companion—his one and only confidante. He had been wont to speak aloud the remorse, the agony, the longings that crowded his breast to the slender child who sat with her little hand locked in his, listening without understanding, yet seeming to have fullest comprehension and sympathy in her great lustrous grey eyes. As

she grew older her sympathy grew with her, and when Hester was ten she was absolutely linked to her father in very thought, in very deed.

His marriage with Helen Drewe was a terrible grief to the child. With that unfeeling instinct of the very young that is revealed also in dogs, Hester shrank from the honied sweetness of the beautiful woman, and feared her very presence. She never spoke out her dislike, she only drew away from the woman who inspired this fear, and clung more closely to her father, who was slipping away from her tender little hands so surely and so swiftly. When he went Hester was like a creature stricken blind and dumb; she could shed no tears, she refused food for days, was cajoled and threatened into eating in vain, and only persuaded at last by the employment of her father's name and wish.

Then followed a period of wandering. The girl could not trace the path of that part of the past; they had moved about so continually, Mrs. Trefusis, Violet, and she. The children were taught in scraps and bits; languages, of course, they quickly learnt from constant conversation. Hester's one delight was her father's collection of books; Violet's joy, attiring herself in her mother's finery and looking at her lovely reflection in every mirror she came across.

When Violet was sixteen and Hester nearly fifteen, Mrs. Trefusis resolved to send them to school; not together, however, for even as children there had been no sort of affection between them. Hester was sent to a convent at a very small cost; Violet to a small, select, most expensive pension in the best part of Paris. Both girls were still at school when Mrs. Trefusis became Mrs. George Munro Campbell, and it was to Sedgebrooke—Mr. Campbell's lovely old country home—that they were conveyed at the end of their holidays.

The news of the marriage was by no means unexpected by either of the girls; a close and constant acquaintance with Mrs. Trefusis's life

and ambitions had educated them in many things unknown, and indeed undreamed of, by most young creatures of their sex and age. Hester heard the intelligence in silence, but the contempt and scorn, which rose so strongly within her, turned to pity when she came in contact with the man who had made so rash a step and bound himself to such a wife. There was immediate liking and sympathy between Hester and George Campbell, and consequent jealousy and bitterness on the part of Mrs. Campbell.

It was, in fact, her manner to her step-daughter that opened her husband's eyes to her real nature, and laid bare before him the hideous mistake he had made. He had been tricked and fooled and blinded as Jack Trefusis had been before him. Only in his case the awakening was more sorrowful; for Trefusis had never loved the woman, and George Campbell had worshipped her with a love that was all the greater because it came to him late in life.

Violet had been enchanted at her mother's marriage, and she danced about the beautiful house and gardens, on seeing them for the first time, in a way that delighted her new father. The advent of the two girls was indeed a great pleasure to the simple, good-hearted country gentleman, and he at once lost his heart to Violet's startling beauty, though he had a stronger affection and interest in the other girl, who was so silent, so grave, so sweet, and yet so young. "Sunlight and shadow" he called them, and the names were not inappropriate.

All went happily for a time till Mrs. Campbell's jealousy and ill-concealed dislike for her step-daughter broke the spell; the disillusionment that followed was swift. Hester knew it must come, though she had hoped for the kind gentle sportsman almost against hope; but one goal once obtained on the social upward path, Helen Campbell wanted more, and when the difficulties of a rapid progress were gently laid before her by her husband,

her spirit of restraint and patience gave way, and she dropped the mask altogether.

After that it was but a sorrowful state of affairs at Sedgebrooke; there was not even a pretence of good understanding between the master and mistress. Filled in her ambitious desires; furious with her husband's family for their refusal to recognise or meet her; furious with her husband for submitting to this state of affairs; furious with herself for having, as she termed it, "flung herself away on a stupid fool of a country bumpkin" with not even money enough to offer consolation for his own deficiencies, Mrs. Campbell made no effort to heal the breach between her husband and herself; in fact, took keenest pleasure, so it seemed, in demonstrating to him her repugnance for his presence, and her rage at herself for her folly.

In his trouble and disappointment, George Campbell found his greatest pleasure in Hester's society. He was fond of Violet, too, she was much too clever to allow him to be anything else—Violet was far more advanced than her mother in some matters—but he treated Violet as a lovely baby, whereas in Hester he found a companion of already rare intellectual gifts and mental power—a being full of divine sympathy and noble thoughts. Sportsman as he was, George Campbell had other attributes of a higher nature; he was a most earnest student, and had for years been engaged on an interesting compilation of facts connected with the history of his clan and family.

It was Hester's joy to help him in his work, and Mrs. Campbell allowed the girl to do so because there were one or two points about her husband she did not dare press too hard, and his affection and friendship for her step-daughter was one. She had, however, many little means at her disposal for giving Hester to understand that though the master of the house regarded her kindly, the mistress did not and never would. The girl was housed with as much discomfort as was possible in such a luxurious place. The servants, always ready to take their cue from their superiors, treated her with scant courtesy; they had gathered from her linen and from her shabby old clothes that she was dependent on Mrs. Campbell's charity for the very bread she ate, and they despised her accordingly.

Hester's manner, too, did not tend to endear her to her step-mother's household; she was so cold and proud she never stooped to laugh and gossip with the maids as Violet was wont to do. Contrasted with Violet's radiant individuality she was discovered to be as ugly as she was cold, and her pride was set down as misplaced and wrong in one of her dependent position.

There were several old servants scattered about the place who could have told a different tale to this. They had been ousted from their posts to make way for the new, and in most cases foreign servants Mrs. Campbell had brought into the house; but though they no longer served, they were not forgotten or overlooked by their master, and it was to the one or two little cottages scattered about the estate that Hester frequently wandered her way when her labours in the library were finished.

George Campbell's sudden and shocking death prostrated the girl with sincere grief; she had grown to love the kind, gentle, courteous man, and she knew he loved her in return. The blank in the house when he was gone was terrible to Hester, she sat for many and many a day in her own room—a room bare of all pretty things, destitute almost of necessities. But she felt at home up here—she was at peace. Her books were ranged on their shelves beside her bed; her treasured pictures of her father and an old-faded one of her mother were close beside it, too, so that her eyes on opening could immediately behold them.

There were a few odd things, gifts from her school comrades, and a crayon sketch she had done herself of George Campbell, greatly to his

delight, to cover the blank walls and then there was the big window that pictured one of the loveliest views of the park, and which was a source of never failing solace and artistic pleasure to the girl. She could lie in her bed and watch the trees wave gracefully to and fro against the background of the clear blue summer sky, watch the sun rise and set, see the moon spread her gentle silver radiance over the whole earth like some beneficent beautiful creature who desired to touch all nature with a softening, hallowing grace.

Bare, cold, lonely as it was, Hester loved her room, and it was therefore no punishment to her to find that her step-mother intended to keep her a prisoner there for an indefinite period. She was given permission, it is true, to go out into the grounds, but only on condition that she used the kitchen entrance, and confined herself to the gardens attached to the humble part of the house. In cutting the girl off from her daily sojourn in the library, Mrs. Campbell knew what she was doing, and was quite content in the fact; for it there was one spot that gave Hester intense pleasure it was the big oak-panelled room with its rows and rows of priceless books, and its old sweet-voiced piano, that had grown to be as dear to the girl as any human companion.

Here she had sat with George Campbell, happy in her task of helping him, and here she had come every day since the moment she had found courage to enter the room after his death; and in the old-world peaceful atmosphere, with some well-loved book in her hand, and the piano to respond to her touch when her soul was full, Hester had managed to forget the bitterness of her lot, the disappointments and pain that filled her young heart.

All this her step-mother knew right well, and she had suffered the girl to go her own way in peace, knowing also that when the moment came for stopping this simple pleasure the disappointment would be doubly keen from the fact of strengthened association and habit; and so indeed it was. Hester, cut off from her one enjoyment, and proudly sensitive to the indignity of being relegated to the servants' quarters, was quite as miserable and lonely as even her step-mother's malicious heart could desire.

She sat long into the night gazing up into the dark clear sky and thinking out some plans for the future. She had never had a direct communication with her father's lawyer, except once, when he informed her of her small possessions, told her he was her trustee, and expressed a hope she would apply to him if at any time she needed his services.

"I think I will write to Mr. Chetwynde and tell him I must go away from here. It is true she is my guardian until I am twenty-one, but if I give up my money to her she cannot object to my going. Surely she must rejoice to be free of something she hates so much!" Hester said to herself, with a faint smile of bitterness. She was walking to and fro in the room. The moon had risen, and by its pale light she could see her few well-loved pictures easily. She stood looking at her sketch of George Campbell, and tears gathered slowly in her beautiful eyes.

"While he lived, it was different," she said to herself. "I would have stayed on for years for his sake for I think I gave him some pleasure, and he was my only gleam of happiness! How good he was!" She looked at the kindly genial face steadily, and as she looked she could see the handsome young features of Lord Thurso grow in his uncle's likeness.

"I wish they could have met again; how fond he was of the boy, as he called him. I wonder if Lord Thurso knew how fond he was, and Lady Allie too."

Hester sighed and sat down on the edge of her narrow bed.

"It is funny to think how familiar I grow with them; I seemed to know them quite well, Dick and little Allie. I almost learned to love them, and yet"—she smiled wistfully—"no doubt they would regard my

foolishness as impertinence. I am sure Lord Thurso thought me a strange creature, perhaps, as Mrs. Campbell said, something in the light of a fanatic. After all, our dreams are the sweetest and truest part of our life. Before this young man came and I saw him in his actual being, I could have my dreams about him; he could belong to me a little, I might call him my friend though I did not know him; but now—"

She undressed slowly, knelt long in prayer, and then got into bed, but not to sleep. She was beset by a longing to be away from this place, away from the miserable, deceitful, baneful influence that had been about her so long.

"There must be some work I can do, something by which I can earn my bread and live a life in which I can breathe freely. I know many things, I could teach well, I think; and though I am young, I do not look my age. People would not be afraid to trust me, and they would grow to know they could trust me indeed and in truth. If only I could get away from here! But how am I to go? If I ask for help, I am sure she will not give it to me. I must write to Mr. Chetwynde; he told me to turn to him if I had need of him, and the time has come. I can bear this life no longer. I will ask him to help me to leave it."

The following day Hester wrote her letter, seeking through her collection of her father's papers till she found the lawyer's address and when one of the maids came in with her luncheon—neither a dainty repast nor daintily served—Hester gave her the letter, asking her in her cold proud way if she would kindly see that it went to the post. She was so scrupulously honest and straightforward herself, it never entered into her head to imagine that the letter would not be posted, and she ate her luncheon with the lightest heart she had felt for many and many a day.

"I shall hear from him soon, and he will help me to leave here," she said to herself gladly, and through the long hot hours as they passed she was cheered and comforted by this remembrance; while at the very moment her letter lay crushed in Mrs. Campbell's shapely hand, and her hope of aid was even further off than it had been before.

Wednesday went, Thursday passed, and Friday was grown into a glorious afternoon when a tap came at Hester's door, waking her roughly from her thoughts and dreams of her future as she sat at her work of painting the glimpses of the garden as seen through her window. By the next post she hoped for Mr. Chetwynde's answer; but she told herself she must not be too hurried, perhaps the lawyer might be away, might have moved, or some such thing, and it might take long for the letter to reach him. That he would get it eventually, however, she firmly believed.

She answered the knock at the door in her thoughtful far-away voice, and then she frowned as there came the sound of a laugh, a subtle whiff of fragrance on the air, and Violet's lovely face and form invaded her sanctuary. It was the first time, indeed, that Violet had entered her step-sister's apartment, and she could hardly refrain from making a face of dismay and horror at the contrast it presented to her own pretty little nest that her mother's hands and brains had devised in a fashion that was as costly as it was pretty.

Here there were no blue silk hangings to the bed, nor fluted silk panels on the walls, nor thick piled carpet on the floor, no white carved toilet table with silver ornaments innumerable, no tall glass scent bottles, no mirror or photographs, no delicate hued dressing-gown or other feminine fancy strewn about. All was cold, hard, clean, bare as a hermit's cell and yet Violet's shrewd calculating nature could not refuse a measure of beauty and picturesqueness to the graceful girlish figure standing brush in hand before a well-stained easel and stretch of canvas.

Hester, in her loose blouse of blue linen, with her hair coiled high out of her neck leaving her lovely column of white throat fully ex-

posed, was in her way a rival to Violet though the white muslin gown the latter wore was rich with lace and had cost a small fortune.

"Dear Hester, may I come in? I want to see you so much; I have been wanting to come all yesterday and all the day before, but, do you know, I was frightened to come. I thought perhaps you would be angry with me; it was silly, wasn't it?"

Hester looked at the speaker, whose voice and manner would have proclaimed to a casual person the very epitome of pretty youthfulness. Hester's straight brows contracted as she looked.

"What do you want, Violet?" she asked in her almost direct manner. Violet had the knack of making her absolutely brusque.

"A chair first," Violet laughed, whisking herself about in her dainty gown. "Oh! there isn't one. Never mind, I will sit on your bed; you will let me, won't you, Hester? I shan't crush it, I am only a little thing, you know!"

She sprang on to the bed as she spoke and sat dangling her little bronze covered shoes to and fro. She looked strangely out of place in this grey auster chamber. Hester stood in the same cold uncompromising position.

"You want me to do something, Violet?" she asked, going very straight to the point.

Violet answered with her low rippling laugh.

"Dear Hester, you are so funny, you speak just like a sergeant or a major or some commanding officer. You really shouldn't be so sharp with me," this with a touch of babyish plaintiveness. "I don't want ordering about, I only want to love you and be nice to you. Why won't you let me love you and be nice to you, Hester?"

Hester's magnificent eyes fixed themselves on the lovely speaker, and involuntarily Violet shivered. She felt as though she were being denounced by a whole tribunal of justice when those clear grey eyes rested on her.

There was a pause for a moment during which Hester began to put aside her painting paraphernalia. When she spoke, her voice was colder than before.

"I shall be glad if you will tell me what you wish with me, Violet," she said.

"May I not come and pay you a visit sometimes; is it so very strange I should like to do this?"

Hester answered "Yes" in the very quietest and most determined way, and went on washing her brushes.

Violet bit her lip, and the hard look flashed over her face for an instant. Why was it so easy to deceive the whole world, play upon everyone just as she liked, and yet not be able to move this girl or to hide one single trait of her real self from the steadfast gaze of those great grey eyes? She had a moment's longing to drop the *riche* she had played so long, and come to open warfare with her step-sister; but Violet was pre-eminently calculating, she never allowed herself to give way to her emotions when she had any, and she saw quickly that, disagreeable as it was to deal with Hester as it was, it would be far more disagreeable were she to let the veil drop and forgo her assumed individuality, just for the gratification of striking out a little harder now. Who could tell what the future might bring forth. Improbable as it seemed, it was still not impossible that she might have some need of Hester, require to use her in some way. It was Violet's universal feeling towards her fellow creatures that they had been sent into the world especially to be used to serve her and her selfish ambitions.

She therefore curbed her anger and refused to give Hester the gratification of letting her realize how well she had judged her butterfly step-sister. She had come up on purpose to convey a sting of annoyance to Hester, and she could do this equally well in her usual laughing fashion as in a serious one. She ceased swinging her feet and slipped to the ground.

"I don't know why you should say that, Hester. You are very unkind," she said, with a tremulous quiver about her lips and a droop

of her heavily fringed eyelids; she was the personification of childish pathos, and she would have sent a pang of pain to Lord Thrusso's honest heart could he have seen her now. Hester was unmoved by the pathos; she knew it was only acting, and she despised it accordingly.

"I have no wish to be unkind, Violet," she said, quietly, "but I think by this time you know me a little. I never pretend anything. I never stoop to hypocrisy. If I could feel you came up here to see me to-day—your first visit though we have been under this roof together over a year now—for the pleasure of being with me or of giving me pleasure, I would welcome you from my heart of hearts, but—" she paused a moment and laid aside her last brush, "but I know this is not so, and you know that I know it."

Violet pouted.

"I know nothing of the kind. Oh! dear Hester, you are always so serious. I feel as if I were going to a funeral when I come near you. It is very hard we can't be friends. I am sure it is not my fault. I try and try and you snub me all the time. You care for nobody but yourself. I daresay you will only be delighted when you go away to-morrow and leave us all, and you won't care if I care a bit, and—"

"Go away to-morrow!" Hester looked round in quick, startled fashion; her heart began to beat very fast. "Go away to-morrow! What—what do you mean, Violet?"

CHAPTER VI.

Violet opened her big blue eyes in well-assumed astonishment.

"Why, I thought you knew. Did not mamma tell you? She said she was coming to tell you yesterday, and that is why I came up to-day. I wanted to be kind to you, and to ask you if there was anything I could do to help you. I am sorry you are going. I should be so unhappy if I were going back to school, but mamma said—"

"Please speak more plainly, Violet," Hester said. Her voice was apparently very calm, but Violet's ears caught the tremor in it, and she saw that the tall slender figure was thrilling with excitement and nervousness. "You have come up here to announce some news to me. I shall be glad if you will fulfil your task without more delay!"

Violet's lovely face was eloquent with surprise and denial.

"Indeed, and indeed I don't know what you mean. I came up, as I said, because I was sorry for you and wanted to help you. I can pack beautifully, only just try me; and look, Hester, I have brought up my photograph in a real silver frame, so that you shall have something to remember me by when you are in your prison. Oh! yes, I must call it a prison, though mamma says it is just like a home, and she is sure Mr. Chetwynde would never have chosen it if—"

"Mr. Chetwynde!" Hester's very lips were pale. She could say no more. Violet went on babbling out the rest of her story.

"Yes, didn't you know? Mr. Chetwynde wrote to mamma yesterday and said he had heard from you, and you wished to have more schooling or something of that sort—though how you can want more school I don't know—and he said mamma was to let you have your wish, and suggested you should go to a school over at Helmsstone; you know the place near here—we rode through it once, I remember—and mamma went there yesterday, and all is settled and you are to go to-morrow; and, dear Hester, I do hope, oh! I do hope you will be very happy there; but you won't work too hard, will you, Hester? you will grow so thin and make yourself old, and—"

"Will you leave me, please!" Hester said, suddenly. Her voice was clear and cold as ice, and her eyes rested on the radiant loveliness before her in their vigour of contempt,

repugnance and pain. She was standing proudly erect, one hand resting on the back of her chair; the iron of the bitterest disappointment had entered her heart. She had not known how strong and big her hope had grown until now; she had not realised how much she had built on Mr. Chetwynde's loyalty and assistance. That he should have treated her appeal in this manner, have answered her letter in such a way, was for the moment incredible to the girl. She had never meant to leave her step-mother's house secretly. She had desired nothing dishonourable or underhand; she had intended Mrs. Campbell should know all her movements; but she had felt that single-handed she would never have won her end, never have got her independence, and that was why she wrote to her father's lawyer invoking his aid. Well, it was only another lesson in the hard weary pathway of life's education.

Once again she had trusted and she had been mistaken. It hurt her pride keenly that Mr. Chetwynde should have ignored all personal response, and should have written to her step-mother without studying her wishes or her feelings.

Hester said she had desired to work; she had made no mention of more school. The lawyer must have misread her letter; and, in sending an epitome of her wishes to Mrs. Campbell, had settled the matter in this peremptory and, to her, painful fashion.

Had Hester been inclined to doubt the honesty of the present proceedings, the mention of the lawyer's name in connection with them would have set that doubt on one side. Violet's statement carried truth in it for once. She had written to Mr. Chetwynde, and no one had known this but herself, hence she could not accuse her step-mother of complicity in a matter of which she had been absolutely ignorant. She must accept the position; there was nothing else to do. Without outside aid she was powerless. She had not a penny in the world, she knew nothing of the world. She had made her struggle and been beaten. She must resign herself utterly, set her teeth grimly, and face the years that must pass before she could claim her freedom with her majority.

It was always a disappointment to Violet that she could not manage to wring a murmur out of the proud reserved nature, no matter how much mental suffering might be put upon it. She hated Hester more than ever in these moments, for she was compelled to recognise the power, the beauty of the noble spirit which lived in the other girl, and to contrast it with the poverty and meanness of her own, and, as has before been stated, so enormous was Violet's vanity that even this mental superiority, which was hidden from all save Hester and herself, made her furious to realise.

She pretended to be deeply hurt by Hester's words.

"Of course I will go if you don't want me—but—but—you are not very kind or nice to me, Hester, and I do try to make you happy. I am sorry I came now, and I am sorry I brought my picture, for, of course, you will not care to have it; people only care for the pictures of those they love. I am sorry you don't love me, Hester. I know I am not clever or grand, or anything like you are, but—"

"I think you are very clever," Hester said, quietly, "and I am sorry if I hurt you in any way, Violet; but I cannot play the hypocrite, it is not in my nature. Thank you for coming up so far with this information. I am sorry you have taken so much trouble; a note would have answered the purpose, and it is a long journey to this part of the house. As you are going down now, may I ask you to convey to your mother a message from me to the effect that I shall be glad to know the exact arrangements for my departure to-morrow."

Violet walked away with an air of plaintive injury. She carried the silver-framed picture

in her hand, and her face was hard and furious as she closed the door of Hester's room behind her. She had done what she had done from the very purest spirit of malice, but she had neither a pleasant nor comfortable nor a satisfactory sensation in her mind as she walked away. The only thing that was in the least pleasant was the recollection that within the next forty-eight hours Hester would be gone, and she would be free from the one and only influence that had the power to annoy her and shadow the greatness of her own estimation.

An occasional evil remembrance did arise now and again to disturb her; but Hester's most eloquent eyes, her proud contempt, were far more bitter and disagreeable than memory, bad as it might be. Thus Violet could not but congratulate herself on the skill with which her mother had grasped an awkward situation, and the swiftness with which it was being settled. She had desired to be rid of Hester, and behold on the morrow Hester would be gone, and forgotten too, before Lord Thurso could arrive.

Thurso arrived most punctually on the day appointed for his visit at Sedgebrooke. He had written Mrs. Campbell a charming letter from town, in which he had mentioned his elder sister's illness and the departure of his mother and Lady Alice to Scotland in consequence. Mrs. Campbell could have danced with delight at this news if she had ever been guilty of such an act, for, indeed, it looked as if fate were actually playing the young man into her hands.

She had begun to prepare herself for some natural opposition and warfare from the mother. Lady Thurso would certainly not approve of an intimacy between her son and his uncle's widow. A mother's remonstrance, she knew, was not without its value to the opponents, for there is nothing so good for the flame of a young man's infatuation as the fan of opposition. Still, good as this would be, it would be fraught with annoyance and possible trouble. Thurso was undoubtedly more than fascinated with Violet, and in the three days of his allotted visit he would, of course, drift farther and farther down the stream. Still Mrs. Campbell knew the man she had to deal with. His mother's opposition might and would irritate him and assist the future; but it was just possible Lady Thurso might realise this as well as she did, and in consequence adopt more pathetic and outwardly more gentle methods of expressing her objections, and under those circumstances—well! every Englishman adores his mother, it is part of his religion, and he detests to hurt any woman, his mother most of all.

Violet versus an indignant Lady Thurso stood more than a splendid chance.

Violet versus Lady Thurso in tears was another matter altogether.

So when the letter came, announcing that for the time being Lady Thurso was, to use a sporting term, "scratched" for the starting race, and that Thurso in consequence was utterly at the mercy of her clever brain and Violet's powerful magnetic beauty, it can be easily understood that Helen Campbell rejoiced exceedingly.

Her plans were laid with the greatest delicacy and skill. She drove to meet him on his arrival at the station; but Violet was not visible. Violet had, in fact, gone to spend an hour with her step-sister—Hester Trefusis—who was at a charming school only five miles away.

Lord Thurso did not know that Hester was still at school. No, of course not, she had forgotten to mention it. The girl had been home for a day's holiday on the occasion of his first visit, that was how he came to see her. She was a strange girl, but very clever, devoted to her books—lived, in fact, for nothing else. Violet was so fond of her, she insisted on driving and riding to Helmetstone, where Hester's school was, on each holiday, no matter

what the weather, and this was the duty she was fulfilling to-day.

"She—she is very kind," Lord Thurso stammered; in his heart he called her an angel. He was positively hungering to see her again, it was torture to have to wait two or three hours till she could return.

"Oh! my Violet is the sweetest child that ever was born. You must forgive a mother's rhapsodies, you know, Lord Thurso, but, indeed, I have no words eloquent enough to sketch my little one's true character and exquisite nature." The note that rang in this speech was indeed truth and sincerity, and as such it went with double force to the man's eager heart.

Mrs. Campbell had arranged a clever concoction of lies. She was a bold liar; at any moment her story about Hester's schooling and Violet's goodness in visiting her step-sister might be disturbed by a servant or a chance word, but she risked all that; it was a case of nothing venture nothing win with her, and as a rule her ventures turned out successfully. She made herself more than charming to the young man; but her heart was full of exultation as she saw how restless he grew, and how his hand went unconsciously to his watch to mark how the time went until Violet's radiant loveliness should appear.

"Now that you are alone in that big house in town, I think I must try and persuade you to extend your visit here a few days longer, Lord Thurso," she said, in her most gracious fashion, and the young man assented eagerly. It was a clever move to have sent Violet out of the way in this manner; it acted as fuel to the flame that, the woman's keen eyes read swiftly, was burning deeper and deeper, and burning not with the fierce flicker of a short-lived admiration, but full of the power and vigour of true, earnest love.

When Violet came at last she was in a new and an even more dangerous mood. She wore a riding habit that fitted to her slight figure-like wax; her yellow hair was ruffled about her brows; she carried her hat in her hand and walked slowly; she was slightly pale. She greeted Lord Thurso gently, and turned to her mother with a sigh eloquent of fatigue.

"Mamma, your baby is so tired—so tired!" She was enchanting, bewitching, exquisite to her lover in this guise; there was a suggestion of delicious womanhood beneath her childishness. He was mad with envy at the way Mrs. Campbell gathered the tired loveliness in her arms and soothed her like a child.

"I begged you not to go, Violet," the mother said, with real anxiety, for Violet, with preternatural cunning, had insisted on riding part of the way with Hester. Her mother had given her a hint that her absence would be effective, and the girl had immediately declared her intention of escorting her step-sister to the school at Helmetstone.

It need hardly be said she did nothing of the sort. She donned her habit, it is true, and went for a mild canter in quite another direction; but she had deceived her mother, and she knew it was just as well Mrs. Campbell should have a grain of truth to uphold her in any statement she might make to Lord Thurso, and Violet knew so much of her mother's plan as to be sure there would be some fiction introduced about Hester's absence.

The studied apathy and cleverly-assumed weariness more than made their mark. Violet saw as far through a brick wall as her mother; and indeed the condition of Thurso's feelings for herself could not be likened to a brick wall in the very least—they were far too transparent, they were almost audible.

It is really scarcely necessary to follow hour by hour the events of the next few days. The game started so well was more than well continued. Thurso remained on as a guest in his own house for more than a week; at the end of that time he had laid himself, his fortune, his life, his very soul, at the small feet of Violet Drewe, and, needless to say, his proposal had been accepted.

The young man's happiness was almost unreasonable, his very nature seemed to change in the sunshine of his love and the glorious future that opened out before his infatuated eyes. He lost all his former attributes; he was no longer practical, far-seeing, logical; he lived and had his being in Violet—she was his very life. It was a wild, fierce love she had inspired. A practised coquette, she knew how to play upon every note in the strong honest nature that fate had thrust in her path. Thurso was like wax in her powerful little hands, she could make of him what she wished. He believed in her as he had never believed before in all his days; he worshipped her as something half divine. He was frightened sometimes at his own happiness; it seemed too great, too beautiful.

Mrs. Campbell was more than content—his subjugation was complete. All the same she saw the wisdom of striking still further while the iron was so hot. There was danger in much delay, danger in interference, in family quarrels. Lady Thurso was still in Scotland; her daughter was now progressing towards convalescence, but the mother would not leave her.

Lady Alice wrote a long letter to her brother, but as he had given no orders to have his correspondence forwarded, the letter lay at the house in town; and it was only by telegrams to his club, where he had left some directions, that he heard news of his family in the north. Ten days after Hester had gone away from Sedgebrooke to the school at Helmetstone, Thurso broke his visit, and returned to town. The marriage was fixed for the following week, very quietly, at the country church near the Park. He himself had urged a speedy wedding, and when he had done so, Mrs. Campbell had been careful to thwart him.

"I cannot consent till you have written to your mother and asked her consent too," she said, with a proud dignity exceedingly becoming to her. "I am afraid, Dick, Lady Thurso will be grieved and will refuse this, for you know, alas! she has been very hard to me; but still, we must remember her feelings and also what is right. I have given you my child, but I will have nothing done in an underhand way, no deceit, no hurry. It would break my heart if my little Violet were to reap the storm that would follow in such circumstances."

"Let them dare to say anything to Violet," Thurso cried, hotly. "They shall answer to me."

Then he quieted down.

"Yes, I know you are right, but still—"

He did not like to go on, for he feared he might hurt the feelings of this most gracious woman whom he had learnt to revere and almost love. "But still, we—"

"Still Dick, I must insist, and in fact I will write at the same time as yourself to your mother and express my feelings on the subject, if you think it is wise."

"Better let me do it. I will quote your words, and I am sure mother must recognise your sweetness as it should be recognised!"

The young man spoke with a fair assumption of assurance, but he did not feel it. However, it did not matter, he told himself; he would have wished for his mother's blessing but if he could not have it he must do without, that was all. To renounce Violet never entered his head, he would never give her up. She belonged to him now, body and soul. She should never be taken from him by earthly hands. It was in this spirit he wrote to his mother, and waited for her reply. It came in the coldest, curtest fashion, pregnant with pride, stern and almost harsh.

"You are my son. I cannot withhold my blessing from you, but do not ask me to give my consent. I can never consent to such a terrible mistake. You are being fooled as your uncle was before you. The awakening will not long be delayed, and it will be a cruel one. Marry this woman's child if you will; but do

not ask me to receive her, for I will never do so.

"Your grieved mother,
"MADELINE THURSO"

A week later the bells in the ivy-covered church at Helmetstone rang out a merry obit. In the big red-bricked school house a dozen girls clustered at the windows.

"You hear that, Hester!" one of them cried to a girl sitting lost in deep thought in a corner by herself. "Those bells are ringing for the wedding this morning."

Hester awoke from her dreams.

"What wedding?" she asked, hurriedly, but she knew before the answer came. They were the bells that were sounding the knell to Lord Thurso's happiness, though their sound rang out so joyously on the summer air.

(To be continued)

A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER XVI.—(continued)

"WHERE is the letter? Raymond didn't read it, did he?" Brenda asked one night, as she sat beside her in the dim light.

She had lifted herself and was looking at him wildly. He pressed her back gently upon the pillows, and whispered, soothingly.

"No, darling, Raymond did not read it. It is over there in the table drawer, with the seal unbroken. He will give it to you when you are well and strong again."

"And you will take care of it for me. He must not see it!"

"Yes, I will take care of it for you."

"That is very good of you. He would kill him, and I should die then."

The poor fellow covered his face with his hand and groaned. It seemed to puzzle her greatly, for she touched him and said softly,—"What makes you do that?"

"Because I am so sorry for you, my poor little one!"

"Do you love me?"

"Yes, Heaven knows I do!"

"Then you will make me a promise?"

"Anything! Anything that you may ask!"

"Then promise that you won't let Raymond injure him! I loved him with all my heart and soul, and I should die if anything happened to him. Will you promise that you won't let Raymond hurt him?"

She listened breathlessly, but his only answer was a groan. She lifted herself, looking at him wildly again.

"Promise me!" she cried, panting out the words, hoarsely. "Swear to me that you will do it! Do you hear? You said you loved me, and the promise will make me well. Swear that you will never let my cousin injure him in any way!"

"Lie down, my darling, and calm yourself."

"Not until you have sworn. Then I will lie down and go to sleep. It will make me well, I tell you! Don't you love me enough for that?"

"Yes," he groaned. "I love you enough for anything. I promise! I promise all you ask!"

He took her in his arms, and placed her gently back upon the pillows. She was smiling up at him.

"You are very good to poor Brenda," she said, sweetly. "Some day I shall tell you all about it, but you must never tell anyone as long as you live."

Then all connected thought ended, and she began to babble words of tenderness and love to her baby, whom she imagined to be beside her; and Raymond Bernstein listened in wild horror that no words could express.

"Her baby!" he whispered, with his face buried in his hands when she had dropped

into a fitful sleep. "Her baby! Great Heaven! A mother, yet not a wife, and I have sworn never to injure him in any way! Surely Providence does not record an oath like that. It could not. But the child—the child! Where is he?"

He remained for some time lost in bitter reflection, then lifted his head and allowed his eyes to rest on the sweet face upon the pillow.

"He must be dead," he said, slowly, still thinking of the child—"he must be dead, or he would be with her. The infernal scoundrel of a father could not have taken him from her? But if he has—if he has—good Heaven! I have sworn never to injure him!"

He arose, slipped off his shoes, and with his hands clasped behind his prematurely grey head, he walked silently up and down the room, enduring such misery as his unhappy life had never contained before.

Once in his walk he stopped and looked at her over the foot of the bed. For once her lips were silent. He thought she was dead, and a wild anguish choked his heart. He went quickly to her side and leaned over her. There was a faint breathing.

He heaved a sigh of relief.

"Anything but her death!" he groaned. "I can bear all but that. Heaven grant me her life, and I will find some means to make her happy! I will! I will!"

He cried out the words fiercely, as if his own great desire would show him the way; then he sat down again and covered his face miserably.

And so the weary days and wretched nights came and went with no change for the better. She was gradually wearing and wasting away, and only Raymond was blind to that fact.

"We had better send for her father," his mother said to him one day, as with fearful eyes she stood looking at the little wasted face.

But he shook his head.

"No," he answered, quietly. "She might not wish it, and we must think only of what she would desire."

"But we have no right to keep it a secret longer from him. Oh, my son, can't you see that she is—"

"Don't say it!" he cried, fiercely. "It is not true! I will not believe it! Heaven could not be so cruel as that! She must not die! She must live—live to release me from my horrible oath!"

CHAPTER XVII

It was late in the evening of the same day that Lionel Warrender entered the home that had been his since his earliest childhood. He went straight to his own room and would have locked himself in, but before he could turn the key his mother intercepted him.

He allowed her to enter, then closed the door behind her.

She gazed at his ghastly face in amazement, barely able to repress the cry of terror that arose to her lips. She went up to him and peered curiously at him.

"Lionel!" she whispered, hoarsely. "What is it? For Heaven's sake, speak quickly! Has any new evil befallen us?"

He threw his hat upon the sofa and sat down dejectedly before the glowing fire, leaning his head upon his hand, while his elbow rested upon a table. She stood beside him, with her rigid fingers convulsively pressing his shoulder, but he did not even feel the touch. He spoke, but the answer was uttered apparently more to himself than to her.

"Yes," he said, in a dry, emotionless way. "The greatest evil that could have befallen me has happened."

"What?"

"My wife is dead."

He spoke the words so slowly, so entirely without feeling, that a horrible fear leaped into the mother's heart. She shrunk back from him, her face, in her terror, like nothing

human. It seemed to her for one moment that she must die; then she fell upon her knees beside him and seized his icy hand in hers.

"For the love of Heaven, tell me what you mean?" she whispered, barely able to force the words through her stiff lips. "Quick! Surely you have not—"

"No," he interrupted, wearily. "I did not hold her under the water while she drowned, but I am as surely her murderer as if I had done so. She threw herself into the river, but the sin is upon my soul, not hers!"

The unhappy woman had shrunk down and hidden her face against his knee. She was trembling and sobbing hysterically, scarcely able to control herself under the reaction that had come upon her. A hideous fear had forced itself upon her for a moment, and now that she knew it was not true, it seemed to her that nothing else in the world mattered. It was so light a thing that Brenda should be dead, now that she knew that her son had not killed her.

Mrs. Warrender was not a heartless woman. She had suffered until it seemed to her impossible to suffer longer or more, yet that one brief moment had shown her that there were depths which even she had not yet explored.

For a long time they sat like that, she weeping, and he making no endeavour to comfort her; then, at last, she lifted herself and slipped her arm about his neck, kissing him as only a mother can kiss her beloved child.

"When did it happen?" she whispered, brokenly, when she could control her voice.

"She was buried this morning," he answered, calmly. "We expected the Blants to arrive with the child this afternoon, but they telegraphed they could not come before the day after to-morrow."

"The child?"

"Yes."

"What child?"

"Mine."

"Good Heaven's, Lionel! You don't mean to tell me there was a child?"

"Yes, there was. My son—my unacknowledged son. Now perhaps you can understand the depths of the infamy into which I have fallen."

She staggered to her feet. Her face was white and cold as marble. This, then, was what she had forced upon her son—that son for whom she would have gladly given her life. But it was for his sake, not hers! Oh! surely not hers!

Her very heart seemed dead in her breast, and yet her great love for him caused her to see that this grief of his could not always last. Away off there in that future that is awaiting us all she knew that there would come a time when it would be softened, if not erased, and it was of that time that she must think. He was not capable now, and she must do it for him.

She stood there for a long time—neither of them seemed to know how long—then she spoke again.

"What are you going to do, Lionel?"

"I don't know. I have not thought. I think I should go down and end it all as she did, but there is the child to be considered. I have no right to abandon him."

"No, you have not the right," she said, slowly. "But, Lionel, nothing you could do would bring her back now."

"Nothing!"

"And—and speaking of this marriage—now—would not help matters at all."

For the first time he turned and looked at her. There was no interest, but something of curiosity in his expression.

"What do you mean?" he asked, quietly.

"Can't you see?" she cried, almost fiercely.

"There is no reason now why you should bring this disgrace upon yourself. Twenty-four hours ago—for Heaven's sake, forgive me, Lionel, but I must speak!—you proposed marriage to Violet Clifton!"

"Well?"

"Can you tell her—can you tell the world that you were a married man at the time you did that, and that a few hours later your wife lay in the river—drowned by her own hands?"

She bent forward and looked at him in the firelight. There was something absolutely uncanny in the picture that they presented; but after a moment of hideous silence, he turned again and allowed his eyes to wander to the glowing coals.

"What difference can it make now?" he asked, hoarsely.

She was silent for a little. It seemed to her a horrible thing to do, but there was nothing for it but to advance her own selfishness as a plea against herself. She felt that he must love and despise her for it, but it was the only hope of saving him from himself.

"Lionel, do you forget me?" she asked, slowly, unable to keep the bitter self-loathing from her tone.

He leaped to his feet, as if a hot iron had entered his soul.

"No!" he gasped. "It is that which I cannot forget! It is that which is driving me mad!"

She saw that she had touched the right cord, and pressed it.

"If your father hears this, you know that it will mean more surely disinheritorship than ever!" she exclaimed, swiftly. "And you know, even better than I can tell you, what that will entail. It would mean my destruction. It would mean a degradation such as I could not bear. It would mean an ignominious death that would reflect eternally upon you and upon your son, my boy!"

"Hush! hush!" he cried out, wildly. "I don't believe my brain can bear any more. I am going mad now."

"But you must think! There is not a moment to be lost!"

"But the child—what of him? I dare not abandon him. I dare not even leave him to the mercy of servants, however well paid."

"Have you thought of—adoption?"

"No."

"Why would not that answer? Could you not say that he was the son of a friend of yours, who, dying, confided him to your care? I will arrange a plausible story for you. You can adopt the boy and give him your own name."

"Oh, for the love of Heaven, leave me to myself for a time! Let me have a half hour of sorrow for my wife to myself! Come to me in the morning, if you will, and we will talk over this ghastly thing; but it seems to me like an insult to my wife in her grave for which I must receive the eternal curse of Heaven!"

"Don't, Lionel! You don't know what you are saying. It is cruel, wicked!"

"Don't talk to me of such things? Wicked? I? I am a murderer, nothing else. I can even contemplate denying my own child! If I had not been the vilest thing that Heaven ever created, I should have died and so saved her, and given her her place in the world. Please go. I shall say that soon for which I would cut out my tongue at another time; but I am not responsible now. Go, and leave me for to-night! In the morning you shall think for me, but leave me alone with my bitter grief and my bitter shame to-night!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You have done so much to preserve this miserable secret of yours that I don't see why you should now make the sacrifice your happiness and your wife's life of no avail. You can't do any good now by proclaiming to the world your past errors. You only make known this thing that you have sacrificed so much to conceal, and for what benefit? If it were worth the price you paid for it then, it is worth it now."

"It was Darcy Brooke who was speaking

—his friend, to whom Warrender had gone in his awful emergency.

"Think for me," he said, "for under his hideous anguish I seem paralyzed mentally and physically. You have already done so much; now add this. Tell me what I am to do."

And Brooke gave the answer already recorded.

"But do you forget the child?" asked Lionel, burying his wretched face in his hands.

"No," replied Brooke, quietly. "I don't forget the child. What your mother advises seems a very sensible thing to do—adopt him. It can very easily be so arranged that there will be no questions after the first surprise has passed, and the honesty of the boy's birth will never be questioned. Let your mother take him under her own care; if she can get the consent of that stubborn father of yours."

"But the Blunts?"

"Oh, they are honest people enough! You need not apprehend any trouble from them."

"Nevertheless, I do. Perhaps it is my feeling of guilt that causes it, but it seems to me that I see an expression in that girl's face sometimes that indicates something—"

"Nonsense! That is unworthy of you. Agnes is a good girl, who loved her mistress devotedly."

"And may not that fact cause her to—"

"No. You are foolishly nervous."

"Perhaps; but it seems to me that only honest means can succeed."

"Pardon me, Lionel, but it is rather late to think of that now. Do you want the scandal to rest on Miss Clifton, that you, a married man, had proposed marriage to her? You know what a sensation that would create! Heaven knows it is a bad business all round, but it does not seem to me that you have the right to put that upon her, now that you are free to make your word good. I don't like to be hard upon you, but you have considered yourself too much already. You have no right to do it, let the suffering be to you what it may!"

"But it seems too horrible to contemplate myself connected with another woman so soon!"

"And yet you contemplated it while she was still alive! There, Lionel! That was rather a cruel thing for me to say, but the situation demands heroic handling. You must save Miss Clifton the humiliation that your conduct would put upon her, now that it is in your power to do so."

And Lionel Warrender felt that his friend was right.

A great change came over him within the eight-and-forty hours since he had stood beside the newly made grave. His heart seemed to have closed to every human emotion, save for the little son that had been left him, and that had grown in the short time almost to a passion.

He was rather startled at himself, and tried in every way to shake off that gruesome feeling of indifference to everything earthly, but it was impossible. His heart seemed dead, save in so far as his boy was concerned, and the horrible indifference seemed to have increased as he left Darcy Brooke's presence.

He felt nothing; no interest in himself or in anyone else, save that boy. He did not care what became of him—as well one thing as another. Even his grief for Brenda seemed to have become deadened in those hours of horrible anguish. And as he left Brooke it seemed to him that he was ready to face anything, it mattered not what.

He had grown older in those hours. There was no longer the debonair, boyish look about his face, but it was that of the man who had suffered the anguish of death a thousand times repeated. He was haggard and grave, but there was about his appearance a charm that it had never held before.

All his life he had been called a good-looking boy; but no one would have said that of the grave, thoughtful man who walked quietly up

the street that morning. His magnificent shoulders were a trifle bent, but there was about him something that attracted the attention even of strangers.

"There is the handsomest man in London," a woman remarked to her escort as they passed him.

"Hanged if I don't believe that is Lionel Warrender!" he answered. "I wonder what has happened?"

But Lionel did not hear the words, and even if he had they would have made no impression. He did not appear to notice where he was going, yet stopped as if by instinct, mounted a flight of steps, and asked for Miss Clifton of the servant who answered his ring.

She joined him in the reception-room a few minutes later, distinguished and picturesque in her gown of old pink crêpe.

He arose and smiled.

She looked at him for a second time, then stopped still, a curious expression crossing her face.

"What is the matter, Lionel?" she asked quietly. "I did not know you for the moment. Do you realize that it has been nearly three days since—"

"Wait!" he interrupted, heavily. "Before you censure me for what appears very like neglect, let me tell you that I have been—burying a friend whom I—loved!"

There was something so odd about the expression, something so curious in the tone, that she caught her breath quickly, and yet there was something in the man's face that forbade questioning. She could not analyze the sensation that came over her, but after one searching glance, she went closer to him and put out her hand.

"I am very sorry," she said gently.

He took the hand, then bent and kissed her—on the brow.

It certainly was not the enthusiasm of a lover—it was not what she expected, but Lionel was so changed that she would scarcely have known him in any way.

"Let me tell you about it, Violet," he said, quietly, drawing her to a divan and seating himself beside her. "My friend left a child, a tiny baby but a few months old."

A cold perspiration stood about his forehead; even his heart and brain felt cold, but he was perfectly calm. A horrible sensation crept over the woman beside him. Still, for some reason which she could not explain, she dared not question him. She was trembling terribly. Her lips formed some words, though they were not echoed in her heart, and she could never have told why she said them,—

"Poor little thing!"

He looked at her curiously for a moment; then he said, slowly,—

"I am going to adopt him."

She started violently. She stood up and looked down at him, but there was not the slightest wavering in his expression. He had not asked her consent, but had simply informed her of his intention to adopt this child whom she had never seen.

"You are going to adopt him?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because he has no friends but me. Because there is no one in the world to take care of him but myself. And, Violet, because I want to give him—my name."

She grew a shade paler, but stood there looking down upon him with that peculiar expression still in her eyes.

"Lionel," she said, after a long, painful pause, "do you realize that your position in this affair is a very extraordinary one? Has he no name of his own to bear?"

"He has an honest and honourable one, but I wish to give him mine."

"And you promised his dead mother that?"

"I did."

"And it was she—whom you—loved?"

There was another painful silence; then very slowly he arose and stood before her.

"Violet," he said, quietly, "it is but just to tell you the truth. I loved the child's mother. It seems a cruel thing to say under the circumstances, but honestly, though I confess it comes rather late, compels it. I realize that my words to you a few nights ago might have been called very properly a dishonour to me, and because of that I offer you your promise back. Is it your will that our engagement should come to an end?"

She walked to the mantel-shelf, and leaning her head upon it, looked into the fire for some moments. She was like a draped statue in marble. She turned to him after a time. He was still standing at the other end of the room, and she motioned him to her. He could not fail to see how her face had hardened.

"This woman is—dead?" she said, in a tone scarcely above a whisper.

"Yes."

"And the child—has the name that marriage gave to it?"

"Yes."

"You swear that that is true?"

"Yes."

"Then there is no reason why I should retract my word. I am willing to become your wife."

He bowed and lifted her hand to his lips.

Two minutes afterwards he left the house, and with curiously slow steps Violet Clifton mounted the stairs and went to her own room, looking herself in.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEVER in his poor empty life had Raymond Bernstein experienced such passionate delight as upon the day that the doctor told him Brenda would live.

It was scarcely repressible, and only the knowledge that any excitement might prove fatal to her kept him from indulging in the wildest thanksgiving. But while the terrible suspense was past, it did not seem the longest part of waiting. The convalescence was so slow, so weary.

If she had only shown a desire to get well it would have been the wildest happiness to him; but while her lips murmured no complaint, he could see that she regretted that they had not let her die; and it cut him to the heart.

When the time came that she should sit up for a few hours each day, her aunt would wrap her in a warm dressing-gown that Raymond had provided, and he would carry her into the sitting-room, by the window. To be sure, the view was not what he would have most desired, but it was the best that he had to offer, and he did it with a loving kindness that touched her deeply.

In silence she was fighting against the life that she felt throbbing again through her veins, but will could not end it.

"It is cruel, ungrateful of me!" she said one day to herself, as she gazed sadly into the dirty street. "He has done so much—so much! He is so happy in my recovery. He has been so good to me, kinder than anyone ever was in my life before, and surely I should feel some gratitude. And I will—I will! I will try to live for Raymond's sake."

Then she bowed her head and tried to believe that she meant it. Perhaps she did. She was like Romney Leigh:

"I hoped this feeble fumbling at life's knot Might end concisely; but I fail to die,
As formerly I failed to live, and thus
Grew willing, having tried all other ways,
To try just God's."

Certain it is that from that day the change was more perceptible. She smiled vaguely at his delight when she walked alone to her place beside the window; but the trees were already in bloom, and the balmy air of spring had kissed all nature before the doctor had ordered her out for a single walk.

Only a few blocks up and down the dirty

street at first, and then he suggested that Raymond should take her in a car to the park, and that they enjoy the warm, beautiful sunshine there.

How happy he was, the poor fellow into whose life so little sunshine had fallen! He was like the wretched pauperized school-boy who, through some charity, has been allowed to spend his holiday in the country. He laughed and chatted to her in a way that was almost piteous, and while she could have cried aloud in her pity for him and for herself, she smiled too, and endeavored to make him believe that she was enjoying it all as much as he.

She had never mentioned her child since the delirium had left her, and he had never had the heart to introduce the subject to her. He wanted to know, but somehow his lips were sealed, and he dared not.

It was the sleepless nights that were telling upon Brenda—nights spent in prayer over her darling; nights in which she besought Heaven to watch over and protect him from all harm during his mother's cruel absence.

After that first visit to the park they went there often, and gradually Brenda grew stronger, though Raymond would still believe that she was nothing but an invalid. At first he insisted that she should go for her airing only when he was with her, but by degrees he was impressed with the fact that his mother could take as good care of her as he, and consented that she should go while he was at his enforced business.

And then, one day when her aunt was busy, Brenda went alone. Those little visits to the park had grown to be very sweet to her. The flowers and trees were soothing, and it seemed to her that there was some remnant of happiness in her poor tired heart as she watched the birds and the flowers.

She had few acquaintances in London, and feared recognition from none of these, believing thoroughly in the change that her closely-cropped hair, her loss of flesh, and the angular lines of her once beautifully-rounded body had wrought. And then how different she looked in the plain dresses that she wore now from the gorgeous gowns that her husband had provided for her!

It was a charming afternoon in early spring that she went to the park one day for her usual walk before Raymond should return to his dinner. She was alone, and had wandered about the isolated walks until her feet were weary, and just before time to return to the little room that was "home" to her now, she turned into a more public thoroughfare, and sat down upon one of the rustic seats to watch the carriages as they whirled by her, wondering if their occupants were as happy as she was once in that dim past that seemed such ages away from her now.

She was indulging her misery to its fullest, when suddenly her eye caught sight of a peculiar-looking carriage about midway of the carriage-drive. It was propelled by hand, like a baby-carriage, but certainly it was not a baby in it, for the back of the head—which was the only portion of the occupant that she could see—was that of a woman. Behind her was a servant. Some feeling of pity had just dawned in Brenda's heart, over all her misery, for the unhappy invalid, when suddenly she realized that an awful thing was imminent.

The action required less time than that in which to record it. It was only a pair of horses that became unmanageable in the hands of an inexperienced driver, a nurse who lost her head in the moment of danger, and the invalid girl left to her death beneath the feet of the angry animals; but Brenda saw and realized it all in a flash, and quicker than thought she had sprung forward and snatched the little carriage from beneath their very feet.

It was such a very simple action, but it had saved a human life, and as she stood, pale and trembling, beside the girl whom she had saved, a pair of great, shadowed eyes were lifted to hers.

"You have saved my life," the girl said, quietly, "I don't know whether I am grateful or not. I have often thought that I should like to die, but I don't think I wanted it to come in that way. But that is always it, is it not? One never wants it in that way, whatever way the 'that' may represent. Do you know that you risked your own life to save mine?"

"You exaggerate," answered Brenda, modestly. "It was not so bad as that."

"But I saw! If you had been a minute—no, a second—later, we should both have been killed! Upon my word," with a short laugh, "you look as if you were half sorry you were not the second later."

Brenda coloured.

"Not so bad as that—quite!" she answered, slowly.

"However, you were not, and we are both here alive and none the worse for the fright, I suppose; and after all, I am grateful to you. The next world is such an uncertainty, and I am afraid I have not been just as good as the children in the story-books are. They tell me that my deformity was sent upon me to chasten my spirit. That I am wicked to rebel against the will of Heaven! Bah! But there! I forgot that you are quite a stranger to me, and that you cannot be interested in my tale of woe. I wonder what I am to do to prove my gratitude to you?"

Brenda laughed. It was the first time that she had done so in ages, and the sound startled her.

"It does not seem deep enough to cause you much uneasiness," she said, lightly. "There! don't mind! I think I understand, and I can sympathise with you thoroughly. I can understand almost any fate being happier than life under some circumstances. I am afraid I am not a moralist."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the girl, devoutly. "I think I should like to know you. Why not? We have both suffered. I have not a friend in the world. There is no one who does not preach to me, and it makes me insufferably ill. Will you be my friend?"

She put out her hand with a frankness and ingenuousness that touched Brenda to the heart. Everything about her was simple and plain enough, but there was nothing that did not speak of wealth and refinement, either in costume or manner. Brenda took her hand gently.

"There is nothing in my friendship that could benefit you," she said, sadly; "but such as it is, you are more than welcome to it."

"It is what I want," replied the girl, with genuine satisfaction. "Somehow I feel that there is some strange bond uniting us. Don't think that it is from the fact of your having saved my life, for I am not sentimental enough for that. There comes my recreant maid. Will you call upon me to-morrow at four? You see that I am not much of a visitor. I am not much at climbing stairs or covering ground rapidly. Still, will you give me your name?"

"Certainly!" colouring as she thought swiftly what name she was to give and what to be known by in the future. "I am Annie Goodwin."

The name was pencilled in the invalid's note-book, from which she had taken a card which she handed to Brenda.

"You will come to-morrow at four?" she asked, wistfully, as the apologetic maid took her place behind the carriage.

"Yes, to-morrow at four."

Brenda watched the girl as she wheeled out of sight, kissed her finger-tips in answer to one received, and smiled faintly; then, as the little carriage was lost to view, she looked at the card.

"Bessie Clifton," she read.

She started violently.

"Clifton!" she repeated, hoarsely. "Clifton! It is the name of the girl that dreadful man commanded Lionel to marry. There was a resemblance between her and the girl

I saw with him in the carriage. Great heavens! Can it be? And if so—it is Fate!"

CHAPTER XX.

"How foolish I am!"

The exclamation was made aloud by Brenda to her own reflection in the mirror the following day. There was a faint, wistful smile upon her lips. Her cheeks were pale and flushed alternately; and, in spite of every effort, she could not control the nervousness that had taken possession of her.

"What had that little lame girl whom she had met the day before brought into her life? It was a question that she had put to herself a thousand times during the hours that had intervened, without finding an answer.

"Why should I imagine, because her name happens to be Clifton, that she is of the same family as the other Clifton?" she asked herself, with some disgust. "The name is common enough. Am I to deny myself to all the world because my husband grew tired of me and played me false? I have got to take up life anew; why not therefore begin with this girl who has trifled me her friendship? Providence would not have sent her to me in the manner in which He did if He had not intended that I should embrace the friendship. I will do it. There is no reason why I should not."

She tried in every way to convince herself; but when she left her aunt's door that day, with the card of Bessie Clifton clasped in her hand, there was a fluttering at her heart that she could not control.

More than once on her way up-town to keep the appointment she hesitated, and would have turned back, but some power seemed impelling her until she had not the power of resistance, and at last she found herself standing upon the steps of that residence upon which her husband had stood so often. Her veil was drawn tightly across her face, and her hand trembled so that she could scarcely pull the bell.

"I have called to see Miss Bessie Clifton," she said to the servant who answered the ring.

"She said you were to come at once to her boudoir, miss," answered the girl.

It was a positive relief to Brenda that there was no possibility of her meeting the rest of the family, and she followed the girl, smiling at her own stupidity, as she termed it.

Bessie did not attempt to rise as her new friend entered the room.

"I won't treat you to a sight of my walking powers," she said, with a smile, as she put out her hand and held up her face to be kissed. "I am afraid you would not come again if I should."

"But I should think the exercise would be good for you. What caused your misfortune?"

"I was thrown from a horse five years ago."

"Then—"

"No!" interrupted Bessie. "I know what you would say, but there is not the slightest hope. I never shall be any better than I am now. It is not a pleasant prospect; but sometimes it is so much worse that I think I am quite well now. There are days and weeks at a time when I never move from that bed in the next room, and then I never allow anyone to come near me but the nurse, and I hate her. My sister tells me that it is more my temper than my misfortune that afflicts me, and perhaps she is right. I hate people because they are such insufferable moralists. They expect me to see a blessing direct from Heaven in the fact that I am nothing but a miserable clod on the face of the earth."

Brenda laughed.

"I am afraid none of us can see that when the misfortune comes to us."

"Take off your hat. I have told Jane to bring us some wine and biscuits here. I hate

tea, perhaps because it is the fashion. I don't believe people like it as they pretend they do. You are going to spend the rest of the afternoon with me. You need not be afraid of the dark, for I shall send you home in a carriage. I want you to tell me all about yourself."

"There is so little that I can tell you," answered Brenda, with a smile.

"But you are not happy."

"How do you know?"

"I can see it in your face. I can hear it in your voice. There is nothing about you that speaks even of contentment. Perhaps that is what draws me to you."

"But everyone has suffered. No one is really happy; is one?"

"Yes; my sister is. I think that is one reason why I don't like her."

Brenda started.

"Your sister?" she repeated, unable to keep her voice quite steady.

"Yes. I am glad she is gone away. The sight of her made me ill. She is on the continent."

"Oh!"

Somehow she could not exactly understand it, but Brenda seemed to breathe more freely when she heard that. It seemed to lift a tremendous weight from her soul. It could not be the Violet Clifton of whom that dreadful man had spoken if she were abroad. She settled herself quietly in her chair, and watched Jane as she placed the champagne and biscuits on the table beside her mistress; then, at a signal from Bessie, the maid retired.

"We can wait upon ourselves, can we not?" she asked, with a smile. "Do you like champagne?"

"Yes; it is the only wine I care for."

"Then you are accustomed to it?"

"Yes—that is, no, not now."

Brenda coloured as she smiled; but Bessie, leaning forward, covered the girl's thin hand with her own.

"Tell me about yourself," she said, gently. "You have been ill, have you not?"

"Unto death."

"Have you any relations?"

"I live with my cousin," answered Brenda, evasively. "They are very poor, and so far I have been able to do nothing for my own support; but that must cease now. He has as much as he can do without that. It has been troubling me a great deal since I have been getting well. There seems to be so little that I can do."

Bessie clasped her hands closely. Her eyes were fixed earnestly upon her companion's face.

"That is exactly what I wanted to know and hesitated to ask!" she cried, eagerly.

"Why won't you come here as a companion to me? I am not a very pleasant person to get on with, but I believe you would understand me better than another would. I will try my very best not to be too bad to you. Come, won't you? It would be a downright charity if you will. Promise me that you will come!"

"But—"

"Why should there be any 'buts' in the case? You want a position; there are very few things that you can do, and I want a companion. If you don't come to me I shall have to get another who would not be half so agreeable to me as you. Is it that you think you could not endure the sight of an invalid all the time?"

"Not by any means. It is only the fear that you are simply offering me this because, in spite of your disavowal, there is some little lurking gratitude in your heart for what you think I did for you yesterday, and you are making something for me to do because you are sorry for me."

"Nonsense! I was never sorry for any one in my life except myself. You'd have enough to do, I can assure you. The position will be no sinecure. Will you come?"

"Are you sure—"

"I am sure that I shall put an advertise-

ment in the paper to-morrow if you don't promise."

"Then I will come."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow. I am by no means sure that I can fill the position, but at least I can try." Bessie leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"There will be no fear of that. I shall try not to be too dreadful to you when one of my odious attacks is on me, but you will forgive me the next day for every rude and unkind word that I say to you, won't you?"

"I promise in advance," replied Brenda, smiling.

"What time to-morrow shall I send for you?"

"At any hour you choose."

"Then come at twelve and we will have luncheon together. I shall send the carriage for you, and you can send for your trunk an hour later."

Brenda coloured.

"I am afraid my wardrobes will be very limited to come into such a house as this."

"Don't let it distress you. I see very few callers, and I shall be glad to have you in anything."

"You are very good to me."

"No, you are mistaken. I am always generous to myself, but am never accused of it with any one else."

Brenda had risen and drawn down her veil. "Are you going? It is very early!" exclaimed Bessie.

"But I am coming to remain to-morrow."

"That is true. I suppose under those circumstances I can let you go. *Au revoir, dear.* Won't you kiss me good-bye?"

Brenda bent her handsome head and obeyed.

Already a great love had entered her heart for the little helpless thing whom she believed really cared for her.

The web of fate was becoming more hopelessly tangled at every turn.

CHAPTER XXI.

The following day found Brenda comfortably installed in her new position in the home of Bessie Clifton.

She had great difficulty in persuading Raymond Bernstein that it was the best thing for her under the circumstances—that employment was the one thing she most needed; but he gave his consent at last, after the promise was given that she would come to them at least once a week, and communicate with him in any emergency that might overtake her.

There was something greatly resembling contentment in her heart when she took her place in the new home. There was employment. Something to distract her mind from those hideously dark reflections and memories. Something to make her forget, for at least a few hours of each weary day, that little one that owed its life to her, and whom she was longing with all her soul to see.

Yet she dared make no inquiry, even concerning whether her child still lived or had died. There was a vague hope in her heart that some day, when she had grown to know Bessie better, she would tell the little cripple girl enough of her life to enlist her sympathy, and that Bessie would discover for her that which she was yearning to know; but not just yet. She would wait, she told herself, until the time was fully ripe.

Her room was situated next to that occupied by the crippled girl, and it was only upon the rarest occasions that they saw any member of the family.

Bessie was not a favourite. No one seemed to understand her. That she was sensitive upon the subject of her condition, and that she resented their pity rather than being grateful for it, they considered ill-temper upon her part, and had not sufficient delicacy to avoid the subject in her presence.

Her mother, a butterfly of society, came to

pass a few minutes in her room each day, after which Brenda generally found Bessie in a temper from which she did not recover for several hours.

"I wish I could never see any of them," she exclaimed, fretfully, after one of these visits. "Some day I shall take a house all to myself, somewhere in the country, and you and I will go there and live all alone. I believe you would like it as much as I should."

"I am sure I should," answered Brenda, with a smile. "I love the country, and London has few charms for me."

"Then you will go with me? I have a charming place on the Thames, which I call River View, after the name of a place in a book I once read. It is neither large nor particularly luxurious, but it would suit you and me perfectly. We could have enough servants to wait upon us, and live an ideal existence. Will you go?"

"It would be delightful. But would your mother allow it?"

The pale lips curled half scornfully.

"Nothing would please her better. I am a sort of death's-head at the feast here. I am nothing but an annoyance. She may send Mrs. Price up there with us, if she likes, to do the proprieties, though I can't see that I require a chaperone much. She will have little difficulty in posing before the world as a dutiful mother, as she could get to me within an hour if necessity demanded it. I don't think there will be any trouble about gaining her consent, my dear Annie. Yours is the only one I fear."

"I should be so happy!" cried Brenda, earnestly, "I can think of no more peaceful existence than that would be. There would be no longer the necessity for meeting people. You don't like them anyway. How soon do you think we shall go?"

A gleam of colour had come to the pale face of the sick girl. She endeavoured to raise herself up, but sank back with a twinge of pain.

"I am afraid I shall not be the pleasant companion for you that I should like!" she exclaimed, with a wry expression. "I shall be more dependent upon you than ever then, and—"

"I shall feel that I am doing something to deserve your great kindness to me," said Brenda, gently, and with deep feeling. "If you were solely dependent upon me, I think I should like it all the better."

Bessie half raised herself, and kissed the tender face that bent over her.

"I never could be without you now," she said, tenderly. "I don't know how I ever did get along without you as long as I did. It seems to me my life must have been cruelly empty. I love you very dearly, Annie. You have done more for me than saving my life. I think you have saved my soul, for I was becoming very hard and bitter when you came to me."

"I think you exaggerate," answered Brenda, with a slight smile; "but even letting it go at that, I have not done more for you than you have done for me. I am a different woman from the one that came to you two little weeks ago. You have given me something to live for. You have put something into my empty life. I can't explain it to you, but if I were to pass the next ten years of my life upon my knees to you, I could never half express the gratitude I feel."

"I don't understand it," mused Bessie. "You have been ill, but you are rapidly regaining your strength. What else can there be that could make life so utterly wretched?"

"Ah, how little you know of suffering, after all!" cried Brenda, with a world of pain in her tone. "How gladly I would exchange places with you to-day if I knew there was not the shadow of a hope that I should ever walk. Dear friend, bodily suffering is very slight when one compares it to mental anguish."

"I suppose so," answered Bessie, quietly. "Some day you shall tell me all your life."

Not now, you know, but some day when you wish to do so; some day when we are all by ourselves in the sweet country, among the birds and the flowers; some day when there is no one near to hear but Heaven. Then we can be a help to each other. I shall bear your mental trouble, and you shall help my physical weakness. You will do that, Annie?"

There were tears in the lovely eyes that were bent upon the little invalid as Brenda stooped and kissed her friend upon the cheek.

"So gladly!" she answered, brokenly.

"Heaven has surely sent us to each other, Annie!" whispered Bessie. "You must not think, dear, that my deformity is all that I have to bear. When Heaven made the cripple, it made the mistake of implanting in the poor deformed breast a heart like that which other people have—a heart to love, Annie."

"Bessie!" "Hush! That is something that ought to be buried as deeply from sight as the heart itself. I am a fool to even give it a breath of air to feed upon."

"But you see so few persons. You—"

"Do you think there is no design in that? Do you believe that I shut myself in these four walls because I despise all the world for its strength and beauty? I am not quite so bad as that. Perhaps it is my physical condition that makes me so very weak, but I can not endure to look upon his face, to hear him speak in his kindly tone to me, to know that the only feeling in his soul for me is—pity! And but for that I should be less to him than the very dirt beneath his feet. Oh, Heaven! do you think there is nothing in such suffering as mine? Can you see no further into it than the mere pain that racks my wretched body? I tell you it is ghastly. I can not bear even to look into his face, because I know that I shall see there the pitying smile that has grown to be hideous to me. To know that it can never be any different! That I must lie like an accursed log until I die, arousing nothing more than pity in the breast of anyone."

There was a world of scorn and misery in the tone; but her own hardness could not control the pain in her heart. She covered her face with her piteous little thin hands, and tears, the first Brenda had ever seen her shed, poured from between her fingers. Instantly she was upon her knees beside the trembling little figure, her arms wound about the distorted body.

"Dear Bessie," she whispered, "can you ever forgive me for my cruel, thoughtless words? I did not dream that you had this cross to bear also. But you must not think that you alone have such pain to endure. If you were strong and well do you think that it would be easier? Suppose you thought that you had won his love. Suppose that he had become the very light of your soul. Suppose that you had been his wife, and that in the hour when you needed his love and his care the most, he should desert you. You should feel that it had all been a cruel lie from the beginning. That he was less than nothing to you. Can't you see that that would be ten thousand times worse?"

Bessie dried her eyes with a passionate gesture, and pushed the copper-coloured curls back from her white face.

"No, I can't," she cried, heavily. "I should at least have the past to live upon. I should have the memory of past happiness to feed my empty heart. I could look back and say, 'I was happy then.' Oh, it would be so much!—so much!"

"A memory of a departed feast is poor food for the starving," replied Brenda, quietly. "Give me the cruel vacancy of nothing rather than memory."

Bessie lifted herself upon her elbow. She was about to reply. Some wild words were hovering upon her tongue when the door softly opened, and her little maid stood there.

"Well?" she exclaimed, curtly.

"If you please, Miss Bessie, the baby is downstairs," she said, gently.

A flash dyed the pale face.

"Bring him up!" she exclaimed. "Don't let that girl come with him. I don't feel like seeing her now; but bring him yourself."

Then, when the girl had departed, she turned again to Brenda.

"He is a dear little thing," she said, softly, "and does me more good than anything else in the world. I think it is because he is not old enough to pity me. He is the son of my sister's husband."

She had scarcely finished the sentence when the door opened to admit the maid again.

She held in her arms a child about a year old, with sunny yellow hair and great dark eyes. She put the child down beside Bessie, and, at a signal from her mistress, left them. Then, for the first time, Bessie turned to Brenda.

She never forgot the face that she saw. It was grey as dead ashes, and about the mouth had come a blue line that looked like death. Brenda was leaning against the wall, with both hands clasped against her breast, an expression of sickening fear in her eyes.

"What is it?" said Bessie, unable to lift her voice above a whisper.

"That child—what is his name?" muttered Brenda.

"Norton Warrender."

"And his father—"

"Is Lionel Warrender, my sister's husband."

And Brenda did not die. She only sunk to her knees upon the floor, and buried her head in the baby's lap.

(To be continued.)

HORTICULTURISTS tell us that the orange was originally a pear-shaped fruit about the size of the common wild cherry. Its evolution is due to 1200 years of cultivation.

It is said that a person fond of good fruit rarely becomes a hard drinker. The two tastes are antagonistic. The culture of good fruit ought then to go hand in hand with temperance reformation.

In human nature the number seven is prominent. There are seven openings in the head, viz., two nostrils, two eyes, two ears, and one mouth. The body has seven obvious parts, viz., head, chest, abdomen, two legs, and two arms. There are seven internal organs: stomach, liver, heart, lungs, spleen, and two kidneys. There are seven inflections of the voice, namely, the acute, the grave, circumflex, rough, smooth, and the long and short sounds. The hand makes seven motions, up and down, right and left, before and behind, and circular. There are seven senses if we allow, in addition to the five generally reckoned, two others, which are sometimes mentioned, viz., mental perception, and spiritual understanding. The body is said to completely renew itself every seven years, and Shakespeare speaks of the seven ages in man.

Here are a few words which we use every day without a thought of their original meaning. "Gazette" is from the name of an old Venetian coin, worth about three farthings, the sum charged for a reading of the first Venetian newspaper, a written sheet, which appeared about A.D. 1550. "Excruciating" pain, like that of a person "crucified." How carelessly we use this word of terrible meaning! "Milliner," a native of Milan, Italy, once famous for its manufacturers of silks and ribbons. "Terrier" is a dog that pursues animals to their burrow in the earth [Latin, *terra*]. "Sialwart," that is "worth sealing," a war term, meaning Saxon, a fine soldier worth making captive. "Salary" at first meant money given to soldiers to buy salt with. In the same way, emolument was an allowance of meal. "Mausole," a "little mouse," referring to its appearance under the skin.

FACETIÆ.

NATURE, like man, begins her fall by painting things red.

THE more people become wrapped up in themselves the colder they grow.

HE: "A man is made better by a sister's love." SHE: "Yes, and not necessarily his own sister."

PURIFYING A PARROT'S VOCABULARY. — "Johnny, are you teaching that parrot to swear?" "No'm. I'm just telling him what it mustn't say."

FATHER: "What is to be done with my foolish boy, doctor? He has fallen in love with my wife's maid!" "Ah, eh, umph; let him marry her, that'll cure him."

HUSBAND: "If you don't stop using those cosmetics, you'll have facial paralysis." WIFE: "Well, you've often said my features look best in repose."

DAUGHTER: "Shall we invite Dr. Bigbee to the reception?" MOTHER: "I think we'd better not, he's so absent-minded. He might charge it in the bill."

ONE MAN: "My wife is eternally gadding about. She's never home. Is yours?" ANOTHER MAN: "Don't know. I'm never at home enough to find out. What'll you take?"

"HAWKINS is very fond of his horse, isn't he?" "Why, no; he hates him." "That's strange. I saw him riding in the Row the other day, and he had his arms about the animal's neck."

MOTHER: "Did you take good care of the parrot when I was in the country, Tommy, and not let it learn any bad words?" TOMMY: "Yes'm. I always took it out of the room when pa was sewing on a button."

MAMMA: "When that boy threw stones at you why didn't you come and tell me, instead of throwing them back?" LITTLE SON: "Tell you, mother! Why, you couldn't hit a barn door."

THE YOUNG MAN: "Gracie, what is it your father sees in me to object to, darling?" THE YOUNG WOMAN (wiping away a tear): "He doesn't see anything in you, Algernon. That's why he objects."

MADAM (listening to Mendelssohn's Wedding March): "I don't see why they have the clashing of the cymbals." YOUNG MRS. BENEDICT: "Why, as a symbol of the clashing which are to follow, of course."

"My mamma is awful strict. Is yours?" ASKS THE LITTLE GIRL. "Awful!" ANSWERS THE BOY. "But she lets you go anywhere you want to, and—" "Oh, she ain't strict with me." "Then who is she strict with?" "Dad."

AS A pleasant-faced woman passed the corner, John touched his hat to her, and remarked feelingly to his companion. "Ah, my boy, I owe a great deal to that woman." "Your mother?" WAS THE QUERY. "No, my landlady."

CAUSE FOR CONDOLENCE.—MRS. PLAINFIELD (proudly): "And who would have thought that I should ever be the mother of a poet?" HER NEIGHBOUR (misunderstanding): "Oh, well, I wouldn't worry about that! He'll have better sense when he gets a little older."

"WHAT is the greatest fib that ever impressed itself on your experience, Snapper?" "Well, by all odds, the worst one I ever heard was that your quartet perpetrated last night when they came round to the house and sang, 'There's music in the air.'"

MISS BEAUTY: "I think Mr. Lovelorn is just too mean for anything, and after all the favours I've shown him, too. I used to go to operas and theatres and everywhere with him, and now, when I ask him to do me a little favour, he refuses." FRIEND: "What did you want?" MISS BEAUTY: "I asked him to be one of the ushers at my wedding."

HOUSEMAID: "It does my heart good. It's a pretty picture. Sure and he's the image of you." FOND MOTHER: "But they all say he looks like his father, Mary." HOUSEMAID: "Bless your soul, mum, he is not good-looking enough for that."

THE IDEAL LODGER.—NEW BOARDER: "You would, of course, prefer boarders who would eat anything that is set before them and not grumble?" MRS. STIMBITS: "Bless you, no sir! I'm partial to those who grumble much and eat little."

MRS. WOMAN'S RIGHTER: "If they refuse to pass the measure I desire, I'll cause the meeting to adjourn." HER FRIEND: "How can you do that? You are not president." MRS. WOMAN'S RIGHTER: "I have a mouse in this box, and if they don't do as I want them, I'll set it loose."

"Now, little boys, can you tell me," said a Columbus teacher, "what the effect of tobacco is upon the system?" LITTLE BILLY, who has wrestled with his first chew, promptly held up his hand. "Well, Billy, what is the effect?" "Makes ye wisht ye woz dead!"

"WHY do you let your hair hang down in such a careless way?" asked Simmons of his wife. "Before we were married you braided it up every day." "And it is up-braided every day now," answered Mrs. Simmons dejectedly, while Simmons went out and slammed the door.

YOUNG WIFE: "My dear, the first time I saw you you were with a party of students giving the college yell." HUSBAND: "Yes, I remember." "And I noticed what a remarkable voice you had." "Yes, you spoke of it. Why?" "Nothing, only I wish the baby hadn't inherited it."

"GOOD MORNING, Lieutenant. We are awfully sorry to hear of your trouble!" said Mrs. Darrow, sympathetically. "Why, I—er—haven't had any trouble," answered Lieutenant Horton. "Really? How strange! We understood that you had become involved in some captain's mess over at the fort."

"DID you see my father, Walter?" "Yes; I told him I had come to ask of him the greatest blessing a young man could ask—his daughter's hand." "And what did he say to that, dear?" "He seemed much pleased, said he was afraid at first that I wanted to borrow some money of him."

"DO you know the value of an oath?" asked the judge of an old darkey who was to be the next witness. "Yes, sah, I does. One ob dese yeh lawyers done gib me foah dollars for to swear to suffin. Dat's the value of an oath. Foah dollars, sah." And then there was consternation in the court-room.

LITTLE Ethel had never seen a toad before, and having by chance discovered one in her flower-garden, came running into the house, her face flushed with excitement, crying: "Mamma, mamma, come quick! There's a pocket-book hopping around out here with four legs on it!"

"Ah, can I hope, Viola?" said the young lover. "There is no apparent reason, Mr. Hamilton," responded Miss Backbay, severely, "why you are mentally incapable of hoping, as you would seem to imply by the use of the auxiliary verb 'can.' But if, as I infer, you meant to make your interrogation in the potential mood and inquire whether you may hope, I should say no, you may not."

THE most experienced judge of human nature may at times find himself mistaken. Dr. X— is one of the kindest of school-masters, but incessant vigilance has made him occasionally over-suspicious. At Latin class the other day, his eye fell on a boy, to whom the order was given: "Jones, go out of the room, and take the sweet out of your mouth." Jones, a shy, timid boy, attempted to speak, but was quite inaudible. A sister ran round the room as the boy next to Jones replied: "Please sir, he can't; it's a gum-bull."

A PARISH READER WAS once much exercised at the appearance of a strange old gentleman who, when the sermon was about to begin, took an ear trumpet, in two parts, out of his pocket and began screwing them together. The headle watched him until the process was completed, and then, going stealthily up, whispered, "Ye manna play that here; if ye dse I'll turn ye out."

MISS EIDER: "Well, I maintain that women can do anything men can." MR. GAZZARD: "Oh, no. The auctioneer's business is one women cannot go into." "Nonsense. She'd make every bit as good an auctioneer as a man." "Well, just imagine an unmarried woman getting up before a crowd and exclaiming, 'Now, gentlemen, all I want is an offer!'"

A few days ago a man entered the telegraph office of the village of Ecton, and wrote out a telegram, which he asked the clerk to send at once. In about a quarter of an hour he returned and said to the clerk, "Now that's not sent that telegram." "Yes, I have," said the clerk. "But I say that's not," replied the man, "for I've been outside watchin' t' wires for th' last quarter of an hour, and it's not gone yet."

"CHARLEY," said mamma, "you have been a very naughty boy. You have been playing marbles, and you know I told you that you mustn't, for its gambling, and gambling is very wicked. Now I hope you will never gamble again." Charley promised he would not, and his mamma was so delighted that she took him to the parish fair, and gave him the money to take chances in almost everything there.

"CONFUSED that Tomson!" Mr. Johnson exclaimed. "What's the matter?" asked his wife. "He has just gone and taken one of my umbrellas. It is nothing short of a crime to take an umbrella, and it is a piece of thoughtlessness and carelessness that is too often condoned. It—hello!" "What is it, John?" "Why," answered John, gleefully, "Tomson took one of my umbrellas, but left another one—a better one. Here, run and hide it. He may discover his mistake and be back any minute."

A SCOTCH laddie delivering milk was stopped the other day on his rounds by two police officers, who asked him if his employer ever put anything in the milk. "Oh, ay," was the innocent answer. The officers, thinking they had a clear case of adulteration, offered the boy sixpence if he would tell them what was put in it. "Ah," said the boy, with a grin, "ye wadna gie's the sixpence though I tell ye." "Oh, yes, we will," said the officers. "Gie's it then," said the little fellow. The sixpence was duly handed over with the question, "Now what does your employer put in the milk?" "Why!" said the boy, with a cunning look, "he puts the measure in every time he tak's ony out!"

A WONDERFUL FISH STORY.—"When I was fishing on the Kankakee some fifteen years ago," said the man with the cigarette, "a whirlwind came along and carried off my vest that was hanging on a limb just over my head. It had my watch in it—and a tailor's account. Well, the whole outfit sailed out of sight in less than a minute. Seven years afterwards a party of us were camped on the same river, only a hundred yards further up. It was my turn to do the cooking, so I started out for some dry wood, stepped on a log, which caved in, and lo! as the story books say, there lay my watch, with that same old tailor's bill twisted through the ring. It was still running." "Oh, come off! You want us to ask you how such a thing could be and then you'll explain that the whirlwind wound your watch up so tight that it ran for seven years." "I didn't say the watch was still running," said the story-teller, as he lighted another bacillus exterminator; "I had reference to the tailor's bill. It is running yet, in fact."

SOCIETY.

It was Queen Anne—Richard II.'s Queen Anne—who introduced trailing gowns into England nearly five hundred years ago.

If the hair is falling out, our elderly readers will be glad to know that sage tea is one of the best preparations to wash it with. The roots of the hair must be rubbed with a sponge dipped in ink-wash sage tea.

An ingenious woman has hit upon the idea of a "dress album," in which tiny cuttings of every gown belonging to its owner are to be chronologically arranged under the dates on which they were purchased.

The Duke of Connaught, although a strict soldier and disciplinarian, has no unnecessary stiffness, and off duty will talk affably with the fast-jointed subaltern. This may account for his exceeding popularity with all ranks.

The ladies of Boston, or rather a goodly number of them, have signed a published protest against the docking of horses. They refuse to ride behind bob-tailed horses, or to countenance men who mutilate horses by docking them, or who drive them.

It is the privilege of the Irish Lord Lieutenant to kiss ladies presented at the Vice-Regal Drawing Rooms, a form of etiquette maintained since its introduction by George IV. The widowed Marchioness of Drogheda is said to be the only Irish peeress who invariably declines the honour.

MR. THOMAS ALVA EDISON, the well-known electrician and inventor, is a rather stout man of middle height. He possesses a singularly striking face, which once seen is not easily forgotten. He is only forty-five years of age, although he might be taken as being much older.

ENGLISH women are rejoicing to hear that the American woman's foot is growing larger. They claim that the expansion is due to her taking more of the outdoor exercise for which the English woman has so long been noted, and that the time will come when the American foot is no more ornamental than the English pedic extremity.

It is probable that in the course of the autumn the betrothal of Princess Victoria Melita of Edinburgh and the Duke of Angustenburg will be officially announced. The Princess will not be sixteen until next November. The Duke, who was born in 1863, is the nephew of Prince Christian, who is his heir, and the brother of the German Empress and of Princess Frederick Leopold of Prussia.

ALFRED JOSEPHIM, the great violin player, enjoys the distinction of being called in Germany the "violin king," his son, who was a lieutenant in an infantry regiment quartered at Frankfurt, has been removed from the roll of officers at the request of his colonel because his father came to Frankfurt and took part in a concert. This, in the opinion of the colonel, was "incompatible with the dignity of the German uniform."

There is no foundation for a statement, which has been going round the papers, that the Prince of Wales proposes to attend the Austrian Autumn Manœuvres, which are to take place in Hungary in September. The Prince is going this month to Homburg, and will return to England about the second week in September, when he is going to Scotland, on a long visit to the Duke and Duchess of Fife at Braemar.

The Parisian woman is going in for things hand-painted. Her gowns are decorated with hand-painted flowers, and the vest which she dons with her walking costume is the background of a choice artistic effect. One of the eccentric young women whose chief object in life is to have "something new" painted flies all over her white peroxide vest, and wore it with innocent satisfaction. Hand-painted pocketbooks are numerous, and, of course, the hand-painted fan is more conspicuously to the front than ever.

STATISTICS.

ONLY one person in a thousand dies of old age.

ONE QUARTER of all the people born die before six years; one-half before sixteen.

NATURALISTS say that over 800 species of insects and 183 of plants have been preserved in amber.

IN London one policeman is required for every 312 of the population; in the English boroughs one for every 697, and in the rural districts one for every 1150.

THE law of evolution works in language as well as in other things. Twenty thousand words have been added to the English language in the department of biology alone since Darwin's discoveries.

THE average attendance at places of public worship in England is supposed to be between ten and eleven millions of persons. About 80,000 sermons are preached every Sunday, making a total of more than 4,000,000 each year.

GEMS.

THE man who refuses to profit by experience makes it.

A brute can face a sword. It takes courage to face a sneer.

TRUST men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great.

It is a great mistake to deny the love of power. That it is often abused proves nothing against it. In itself it is indeed one of the chief mainsprings of human achievement.

NEVER be discouraged with yourself. It is not when we are conscious of our faults that we are the most wicked; on the contrary, we are less so. We see by a brighter light; and let us remember for our consolation that we never perceive our sins till we begin to cure them.

It is because so few have definite goals before them that so many fail; it is because so many aim at impossibilities that so few succeed. It is because there is too much wishing for success, with so little unremitting striving after it that so many end in wish-fulfilling. It is because there is too much eagerness for speedy triumph that so many end in defeat.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MIXED JAM.—Two pounds apples, two pounds pears, three pounds plums, six pounds sugar, two large breakfast cups water. Pare the apples and cut them up in pieces, not too small; same to the pears. Pick and stone the plums. Put the sugar and water on to boil. Then put in all the fruit and boil for forty minutes. Put and cover.

QUICK BEEF TEA.—With a sharp knife scrape one pound of lean beef on a board. Place the scraped meat into a porcelain-lined saucepan, and pour over it one half pint of boiling water. Cover closely, and set it on the back of the stove for ten minutes; then strain, and place the cup containing it in a basin of ice, or ice-cold water. When cool remove all the fat, and place in a hot cup set in a basin of hot water, when it will soon be ready for use.

SAUCE FOR SALADS.—A good sauce for salads may be made by mixing half a tablespoonful of pepper with a large one of salt and a tablespoonful of Lucan oil. When the salt has dissolved, add three more tablespoonfuls of oil, and pour it gradually over the salad. Mix it thoroughly, then gently pour on one tablespoonful of vinegar and the same quantity of tarragon. Lightly toss over the leaves, and the salad is ready for use.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE are three lodges of Masons working in English in Japan.

MOST spiders have eight eyes, although some species have only six.

HALF a gallon of train oil an hour will calm the most boisterous sea around a vessel.

THE discovery has been made that the soil and climate of Alaska are well adapted to hop-raising.

WILLS are of very high antiquity. Solon introduced them at Athens 578 B.C. King Edward the Confessor, in 1066, was the first sovereign who made a will.

SIBERIA is one of the finest undeveloped countries in the world, and it is really difficult to exaggerate the enormous wealth of this gigantic region.

It is claimed that the anchor lost by one of Columbus's ships on the night of Aug. 2 1498, off the Island of Trinidad, has been recently unearthed on that island.

THE Laplander sleeps in a big reindeer skin, to keep him warm. The East Indian also sleeps in a bag; but it is not air-tight, and is only intended to protect him from mosquitoes.

A SCIENTIFIC paper says that genuine "shy signs" can now be constructed for the enterprising advertiser. By a simple arrangement of mirrors, reflecting-glasses, and lights, a sort of gigantic magic lantern can be set up, by which images can be thrown upon the clouds.

SHALIA' eggs absorb moisture. The most singular thing about them, however, is their marvellous vitality. They may be burnt in a furnace and thus reduced to powder, yet on the application of moisture they swell and regain their vitality, hatching out as freely and successfully as if they had been let alone.

FOR some cause no rattlesnake will cross a hair rope. When a camping party is in a region infested with these vermin, all that is necessary to protect the camp at night is to lay a hair lariat on the ground round the camp in such a way that no snake can approach the camp from any quarter without crossing the rope, and the campers are perfectly secure from intrusion. Why it is so human being can explain, but that it is so has been too often proved to be doubted.

THE expression "hand and seal," which occurs so frequently in legal documents, is a reminder of the time when few men were able to write even their own names. Scores of old English and French deeds are extant, some of them executed by kings and noblemen in which the signature is a hand dipped in ink, the seal being afterward appended, together with the sign of a cross, the name of the man executing the deed being written by another hand. Dipping the entire hand in ink was, however, inconvenient and dirty, and later the thumb was substituted. The seal continued to be used, and though now it has become only a formality, legal practice has in many cases pronounced its employment indispensable.

Or the 1 670 large bottles which the Prince of Monaco had thrown into the sea at different points of the ocean between Europe and America for the purpose of testing the ocean currents, 226 have been returned to him by the governments of the various countries on whose shores they had stranded, and their progress has been noted with sufficient accuracy to lead to the conviction that the movement of the upper part of the water is circular, the centre being to the west of the Azores. The tide of the Atlantic thus descends the coast of Africa, and, running in a westerly direction, flows on towards Bermuda, and then runs eastward. The bottles travelled about four miles a day, and one bottle had drifted about for upwards of five years.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ROBE—England is larger than Ire'and.
P. T.—The gun tax was first levied in 1871.
TOM—You could get the information through a book-seller.

DADDY.—It is against our rule to advise on the choice of a medical man.

DICK—"Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad" is one of Burns's songs.

ESQUIRRE.—No Gladstonian seat has been gained in Ireland at this election.

OPPRESSED.—A husband is not liable for the support of his wife's step-mother.

REX.—The man is entitled to all money (wages) due to him on the day that he is dismissed.

A TROUBLESOME BOY.—Parents are not liable for damage accidentally done by their children.

DOUBT.—Not if the debtor says he believes he paid the money, and is prepared to say so on oath.

BOUNCING BOY.—The expression "an iron-bound coast" means a rocky coast, with few or no harbours.

JESS.—Janet is an old Scots-French name; Jessie is an English nondescript, not connected in any way.

KEW.—The deepest pit in England is the Ashton Moss, near Manchester; 2,601 feet.

FAIRY QUEEN.—The word *garze* was made from *Gara*, a city of Palestine, whence the fabric was first brought.

B. A. D.—If your wife's brother left no will, she will succeed to the property, to the exclusion of her half-brother.

INDIGNANT FRIEND.—The woman is not entitled, and must not take her step-daughter's money to meet her own personal debt.

ONE IN DISTRESS.—You have no legal right to sell a lodger's goods, but you may detain them until the rent has been paid.

M. B.—The younger sons do not appear ever to have been parties in the business, and can therefore have no claim.

GLAUDE.—Army and navy and prison chaplains are paid by the State; but no other clergy of the Church of England.

HETER.—The great potato rot to which you refer occurred in 1845. In Ireland it caused severe famine and distress.

W. C.—Lord Randolph Churchill was Chancellor of the Exchequer when Lord Salisbury's Government came into office in 1885.

MIDDLEBROW MATTIE.—Tar may be removed from either hands or clothing by rubbing well with lard, and then thoroughly washing with soap and water.

GENIE.—You must go to Philadelphia in first instance; but you are very late in thinking about it; the emigration season is drawing rapidly to a close.

MADON.—The coal and iron district of South Staffordshire is known as the Black Country; but the expression does not mark a definite geographical area.

M. T.—A householder must have occupied a house in the constituency for twelve months, ending July 31, to be entitled to get his name on the register.

STANLEY.—We have no special or perhaps satisfactory information to give; the South African mounted police are now recruited exclusively in the colonies.

ANTIQUARY.—You have a small silver German coin; these even when new are of little value, and we are not aware that there is a demand anywhere for old ones.

MUFF.—We are afraid the daughter has no claim against the furniture dealer, and will have to look to her father for repayment of the lent money.

QUERRE.—On the application of an undefended prisoner at assizes, the judge may appoint counsel to defend him, without cost.

S. T. G.—Zante currants are made from small grapes about as large as peas, which grow in the island of Zante and other Greek islands.

ROBIN.—The Foresters' Friendly Society is not what is called a "dividing" society. It cannot divide its funds among its members.

T. W.—If the company has been wound up of course your claim is too late, but if the liquidation is still pending we certainly advise you to send in a claim.

STANISLAUS.—Purchase in the army was abolished by a Royal warrant, as it was not absolutely necessary to have an Act of Parliament for that purpose.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—The man having no right to sell goods obtained on the hire system, they may be recovered from the persons who have bought them.

A. H. A.—As the son is presumably a full-grown man, the parochial authorities have no claim upon the father for repayment of any sum they may expend upon him.

LOCHINVAR.—The Marquis of Lorne cannot sit in the House of Lords; he is marquis by courtesy only, as eldest son of a peer; the title he uses is one of his father's.

BRENDA.—Any two persons can enter into a valid marriage in Scotland by either accepting each other as husband and wife before witnesses, or signing a written declaration.

CONSTANT.—We could, no doubt, give you an address, but we should know nothing whatever of the party, and might quite unwittingly put you into the hands of a dishonest man.

P. T.—The Free Education Bill passed by the present Government was read a third time without a division, and on the second reading only ten voted in favour of an amendment.

A READER.—Should another house be taken in your wife's name, and furniture bought in her name be put into it, none of your creditors, not even this landlord, can touch the things.

NEIGHBOUR.—We see nothing to prevent the proprietor cementing the gable; of course if he intends asking the adjoining proprietor to share the expense he must take him with him in anything he does.

KHANT.—If your tenancy reckons from a regular quarter-day the notice must reckon from a regular quarter-day, and not from any other day in the month, though it may be sent you at any time.

LAVERGNE.—Property may be left to an illegitimate child, but the child must be fully described by the name of the mother and the name by which it is usually known in such a way that the identity can be proved.

SIMON.—A "laggot-vote" is a vote created by the sub-division of a property originally conferring but one vote, so as to confer votes on two or more individuals practically under the influence of the original owner.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—Pay no attention, and if sent again, answer that you thought the previous note a mistake, seeing you are certain you do not owe the money.

BEW.—All the Ministers remain in office until they resign, even although not re-elected. Lord Salisbury's Government is still responsible for the administration of State affairs.

EVERYBODY'S GARDEN.

All along the wayside is everybody's garden!
There the wild rose blossoms through the summer days;

Bounded by field fences and ever stretching onward,
It is God's own garden. For it, give him praise.

'Tis gay with goldenrod,
There blooming grasses nod,
And sunflowers small and yellow turn over in the sun;

Quaint daisy-heads are there,
And daisies wild and fair.

In everybody's garden each flower's the loveliest one!

All along the wayside is everybody's garden!
Come out, with gather posies; the very air is sweet.

Come out, with hearts of gladness, ye big and little children.

Into our Father's garden, made for our strolling feet,
The little things butterfly,

The fragrant winds that sigh,
The tiny clouds that hover above us in the blue,
The bird's song, high and clear,
Make heaven draw more near.

In everybody's garden the world once more is new!

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Your only hope of relief lies in an appeal to his sense of honour and fair dealing; so work that as powerfully as you can; the signed papers give him a complete hold upon you.

DISSENT.—The fruit growing on your trees overhanging your neighbour's land are yours, and you may legally enter your neighbour's land to obtain them, if he will not give them up willingly.

JEAN.—Mr. Gladstone was Prime Minister from December 9, 1868, to February 21, 1874; from April 28, 1880, to June 24, 1885; and from February 6, 1886, to August 5, 1886.

DULLARD.—There is no casting vote at Parliamentary elections; when two candidates "tie," the returning officer requires to report the double return to the Speaker, who thereupon issues his writ for a new election.

MAPHROPHILES.—No matter how much of your article time is yet to run; if you were to be discharged at the port or district where you now are, you are entitled to go before any local magistrate and get him to discharge you.

OLAYTOR.—You are not under any legal obligation to assist in the maintenance of your sister, who, it seems to us, is being trained in habits of idleness; let her go to a situation and strive by honest labour to achieve her independence.

W. T.—The fatal affray at Dolly's Brae, near Castlewellan, in Ireland, between Orangemen and Roman Catholics, in which several of the latter lost their lives and several of their houses were ransacked and burned, took place on 12th July, 1849.

LIONEL.—The twitching of the eyes you complain of is as likely as not a symptom of indigestion, and in that case you very likely owe it to your smoking; excessive use of tobacco will cause it; so does excessive use of alcoholic liquors; business worry will also bring it on.

LOVELY MOLLY.—If you mean the Shakespeare that is in South America, that vessel arrived at Talcahuano, Chile, on May 30 to load, and has no doubt sailed now, though the report has not yet been received; if it has we think the ship could be home about end of September.

A. R.—The money will probably be paid into Chancery, and it will then be for those entitled to it to show their rights and receive payment; you should write to the solicitor who has the matter in hand, and he, we doubt not, will give you all particulars.

INDIGNANT.—Neither a master nor a foreman has any right to open or detain a letter addressed to any person employed on the premises. The Post Office authorities can take legal action against any person who does so.

HILDED.—Put your tan gloves on your hands, and wash them with soap and water precisely as if you were operating on your own skin; hang up in the sun and air to dry, pulling them well occasionally.

IN A DIFFICULTY.—While obedience to parents is one of the chief duties of children, there is a limit beyond which parental authority ceases. A child should refuse to commit a crime, even though bidden to do so by its parents.

S. A. B.—You must just find the man called the shore steward; he makes all the appointments on board; jobs almost like those ashore are got by looking for them; don't be afraid to push about; you are doing what everybody has a right to do.

BASEFUL.—If well known to each other the gentleman should raise his hat on meeting or passing a lady acquaintance. If the acquaintanceship is very slight it would be well to allow the lady to give the first sign of recognition.

P. W.—A male aged 37 years must pay annually £37 13s. 4d. for eleven years to draw thenceforward an annuity of £20 from Post Office, or £9 13s. 4d. for twenty-one years to obtain same sum; full graduated tables can be got at Post Office, showing payments at all ages.

DIFFICULTIES.—There is only one way; send the communications to the editors, with stamped envelopes for return if not accepted; but understand that at least fifty communications are received by most popular editors for every one that can be answered.

HOUSEWIFE.—We think that only time will repair the injury done to your cistern by allowing water to run into it from a freshly painted roof. You might have the water run out entirely and keep the cistern dry for a while.

NANCY.—Get a pennyworth of liquor ammoniac, mix a little of it with water in a tumbler, and carefully sponge the grease stains on the coat; or you may find turpentine more useful; used in same way; hang coat in the air or before a brisk fire to get rid of smell.

YOUNG POLITICIAN.—No bill, English, Scotch, or Irish, can become law, until it has passed the House of Lords; to which representative peers are sent by Ireland and Scotland. Peers having a house of their own are not eligible to be elected as members of the House of Commons.

HALLOW.—The precise site of Troy is not known, but it is supposed to have been on the north side of the Hellespont, at the mouth of the river Menderes, near the entrance to the *Hellespont*; of course the story of the famous siege as told by Homer is apocryphal, as probably Homer himself may be.

G. P.—A frosting solution for glass is a saturated solution of Epsom salts—that is, salts put into water until no more will dissolve, but like like sugar at the bottom of a cup; brush the glass with that; slightly warm the glass, if possible, either by putting lamp near it or holding it before fire.

SWINDLED.—The best thing you can do is to congratulate yourself you did not send more to the competition-monger, for your money is lost, without a doubt of it; you could indeed write to the police in the town where the fellow resides, and they might take action against him, but that would not put a penny in your pocket.

DISTRESS.—The Continental lottery is one of the oldest kinds of swindles going; it has been exposed times out of mind, but still people will go on trusting in it, and sending their money to people who live upon the credulity of the public; we regret very much to have to tell you that all you have sent away is lost.

SCHOOLBOY.—When the father dies and leaves no will, the mother having predeceased him, all that he leaves in money and goods goes to sons and daughters in equal shares; no one has right to more than another, or to a preference over others; the eldest son is just in the same position as other children.

THIRSTING FOR KNOWLEDGE.—By a "working majority" is meant such a majority as may be depended upon to support a Minister. For instance, there are always some members absent from a division, through illness or business matters, or by accidental detention elsewhere. So that if a Minister has only, say, a ten or twelve majority at the most, he may, at any time, find himself short of his men, and be outvoted. When the nominal majority is substantial, say sixty or more, it is generally possible to ensure the presence of enough members to prevent a defeat.

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